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Standard
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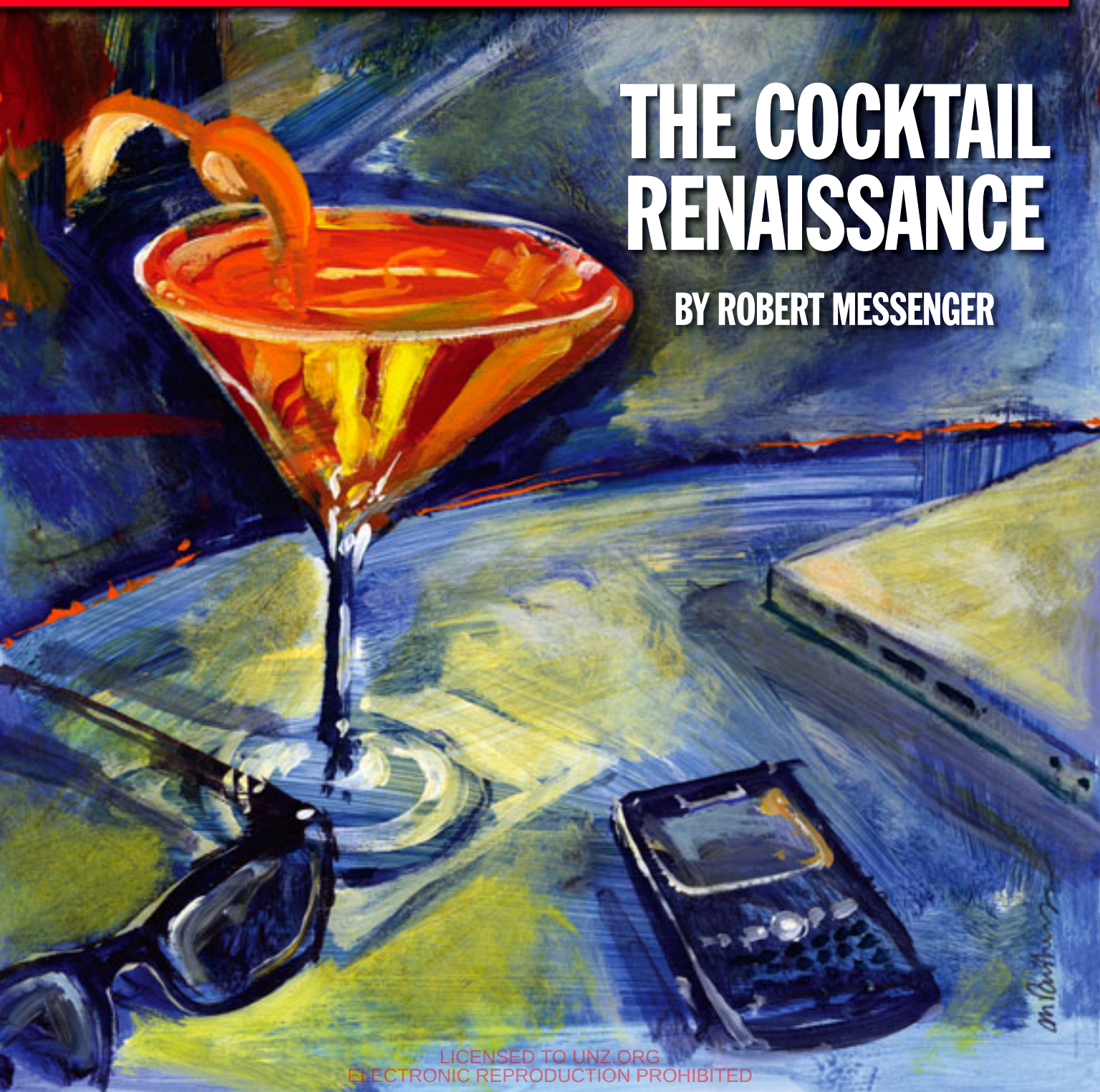
ANDREW FERGUSON

THE COCKTAIL RENAISSANCE

BY ROBERT MESSENGER



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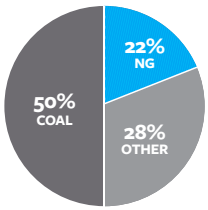
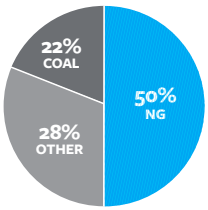


Total U.S. Power Generation by Fuel (EIA 2007)

CLEANER MIX



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In: Budget Vacations
Out: Beverage Taxes

This is no time for Congress to be adding taxes on simple pleasures we enjoy like juice drinks and soda. But that's just what some in Congress are talking about doing right now.

American families are watching their budgets this year – doing more with less.

Middle class families are struggling to make ends meet—they aren't getting raises to pay higher taxes. And they know taxes never made anyone healthy—education, exercise and balanced diets do that. We all want to improve health care but discriminatory and punitive taxes are not the way to do it.

Tell Congress, a tax on simple pleasures like juice drinks and soda is the last thing Americans need right now at **www.NoBeverageandFoodTaxes.com**

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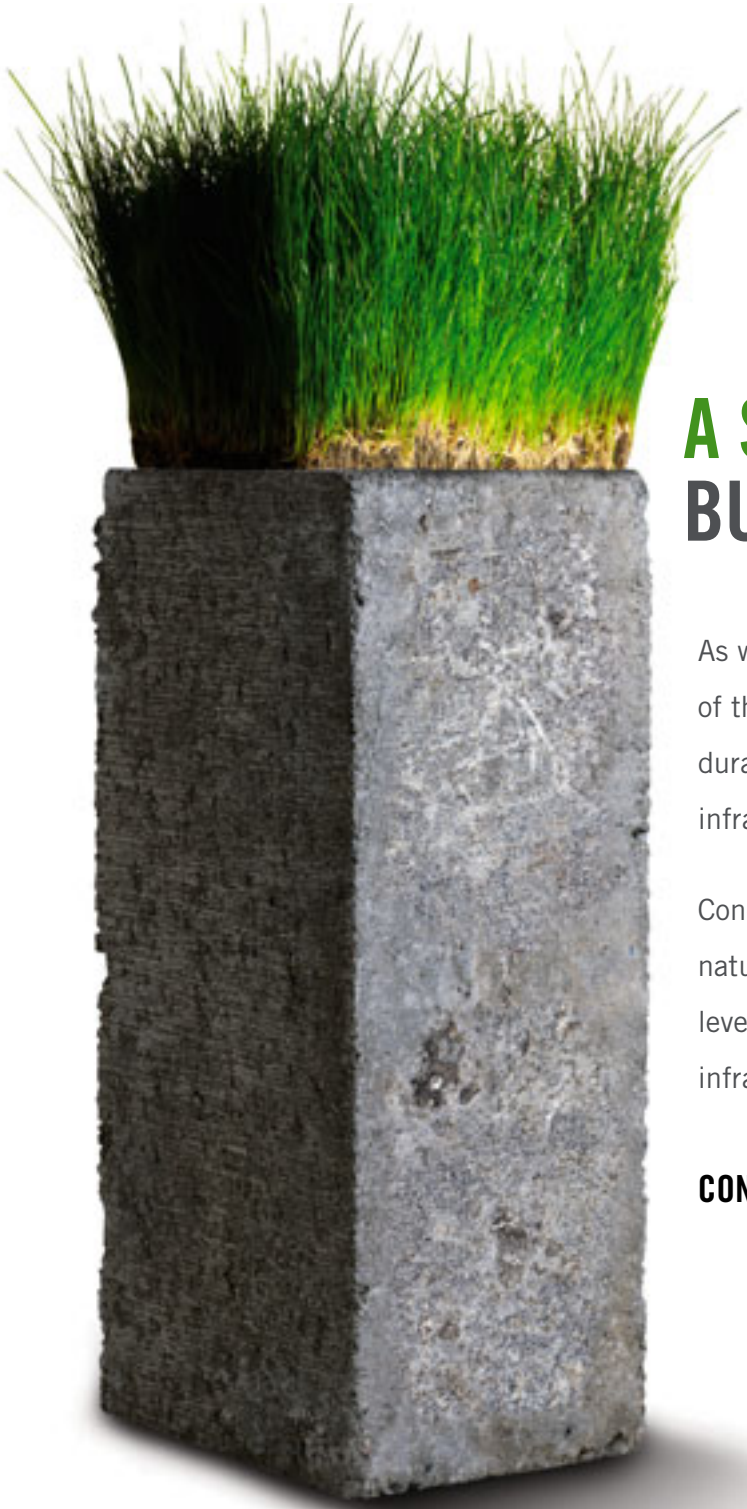

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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And That's the Way It Wasn't

It seems somehow oddly appropriate that the passing of TV news giant Walter Cronkite should have produced in turn a gigantic correction in the *New York Times*, which we reproduce here for your delectation:

> An appraisal on Saturday about Walter Cronkite's career included a number of errors. In some copies, it misstated the date that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed and referred incorrectly to Mr. Cronkite's coverage of D-Day. Dr. King was killed on April 4, 1968, not April 30. Mr. Cronkite covered the D-Day landing from a warplane; he did not storm the beaches. In addition, Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon on July 20, 1969, not July 26. "The CBS Evening News" overtook "The Huntley-Brinkley Report" on NBC in the ratings during the 1967-68 television season, not after Chet Huntley retired in 1970. A communications satellite used to relay correspondents' reports from around the world was Telstar, not Telestar. Howard K. Smith was not one of the CBS correspondents Mr. Cronkite would turn to for reports from the field after he became anchor of "The CBS Evening News" in 1962; he left CBS before Mr. Cronkite was the anchor. Because of an editing error, the appraisal also misstated the name of the news agency for which Mr. Cronkite was Moscow bureau chief after World War II. At that time it was United Press, not United Press International [*New York Times*, July 22, 2009].

A lot of blather and nostalgia issued from the press on the occasion of Cronkite's passing. But the story of his ascent from news reader to secular saint is a simple one. He became a hero to the antiwar movement of the 1960s (i.e., the establishment, media and otherwise, of today) for his central importance in convincing LBJ that the Vietnam war could not be won. And not simply that: He sanctified the New Left's contention that nothing the government said was to be trusted. As he pronounced in his famous broadcast following the Tet Offensive, "We have been too often disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders, both in Vietnam and Washington, to have faith any longer in the silver linings they find in the darkest clouds."

In particular, he disbelieved the American generals who told him that Tet was a military disaster for North Vietnam. It was the biggest story of his career; it made him a legend. But the generals were right, and Cronkite was wrong. Except for a few noble exceptions Cronkite's fellow journalists lionized him for an act of malpractice. (The exception that springs to mind is the *Washington Post*'s Peter Braestrup, the late author of *Big Story* (1978), which recounted his Captain Ahab-like pursuit and correction of the press's colossal misreporting on Tet.)

So we hope the *Times* doesn't beat itself up too much over all those errors: It was a more fitting sendoff than they probably intended. ♦

What Were They Thinking?

AP: INDIA'S JUNIOR MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT JAIRAM RAMESH AND HILLARY CLINTON

Fake Hunger Strikes (cont.)

Last week marked an important first in our grand American experiment: the first celebrity hunger strike during the Age of Obama. Longtime readers will recall that The Scrapbook is four-square in favor of a good hunger strike—the only problem being that modern hunger strikes are even less rigorous than the Lenten Fridays of a lapsed Catholic. And last week's "strike" was no different.

On July 22, some protestors assembled in front of the United Nations to

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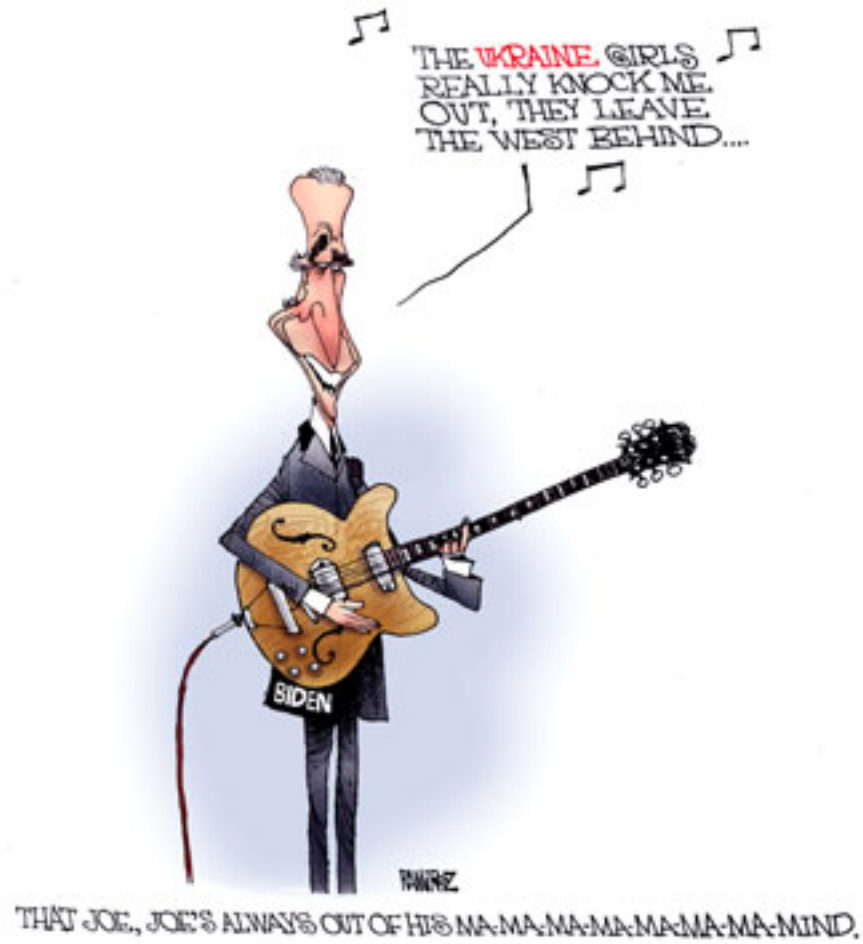

demonstrate against Iran's detention of political prisoners—a position with which we find much sympathy. They were scheduled to hold a three-day "hunger strike," loosely interpreted to mean no eating between 8 A.M. and 8 P.M. each day. (As we went to press, it was uncertain if they'd be able to hold out for the full 72—nix that, 36—hours.)

In the run-up to this awe-inspiring example of self-denial, various left-wing celebrities wrote in to express their solidarity with the hunger strike. "I am pleased and impressed to learn about the hunger strike in which you are participating to support human rights and release of political prisoners in Iran. It is a very worthy cause. I hope to be able to join you at the United Nations," wrote Noam Chomsky.

"A hunger strike in front of the United Nations is one way of drawing world attention to the plight of political prisoners in Iran. I support this effort and my daughter, Amy Redford, will be there as an expression of solidarity with the Iranian people," wrote Robert Redford.

Even more wishy-washy in his support was Sean Penn, who only backed the hunger strike (rhetorically) after first defending Obama's handling of the Iranian despots who are behind the entire problem in the first place:

"The U.S. government has no moral or political authority to tell Iranians what they should do," wrote Penn. "Iranians are perfectly capable of deciding for themselves. That's why citizen diplomacy is so important. Iranian demonstrators welcome the support of ordinary Americans. Joan Baez recorded a Farsi language version of 'We Shall Overcome' that has shot around the world on YouTube. . . . Iranian activists are holding a hunger strike in front of the U.N. in New York from July 22 to July 24 demanding that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon send a special commission to Iran."

Bearing witness was never so pathetically easy. ♦

Kim Jong-Il's Little Corner of Hell

Full credit to the editors of the *Washington Post* for devoting an unusual amount of attention to the horrific North Korean gulag: Blaine Harden's 2,000-plus-word report ran on the front page July 20 with a headline that summed up the cold-bloodedness of the State Department, which has been unsuccessfully panting after some deal, *any* deal, with the Pyonyang regime for the better part of two decades: "N. Korea's Hard-Labor Camps: On the Diplomatic Back Burner."

Hard-labor is a euphemism. Usually it's a drawn-out death sentence. A horrifying example of the capriciousness of totalitarian terror:

> Kim Young Soon, once a dancer in Pyongyang, said she spent eight years in Camp 15 during the 1970s. Under the guilt-by-association rule, she said, her four children and her parents were also sentenced to hard labor there. At the camp, she said, her parents starved to death and her eldest son drowned. Around the time of her arrest, her husband was shot for trying to flee the country, as was her youngest son after his release from the camp. It was not until 1989, more than a decade after her release, that she found out why she had been imprisoned. A security official told her then that she was punished because she had been a friend of Kim Jong Il's first wife. ♦

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Casual

Sister Kari

I arrived at the church promptly at 9 A.M. Five millimeter pearl studs graced my earlobes; my hair was swept back into a neat bun. Remarkably, I was up, dressed, and ready to go with only one cup of coffee in my system. It's rare that I wear pearls, and even rarer that I

skip my second cup of coffee. But this was a special occasion: My big brother was getting married.

The wedding day is an epoch in the rearing of a big brother. I'd put in 26 years of vigilant effort to bring him this far, and I had to admit he had turned out rather well. Of course, there was no need to mention this to him. Big brothers' egos do not require regular testimonials to their greatness. It's usually much more constructive to share stories of their not-so-stellar moments in life (which are generally in greater abundance as well). Like, "Remember when you taped me up with duct tape so you could pretend to be MacGyver?" Good times, indeed. But if you raise him right, a big brother can grow up into the kind of person you're not ashamed to be related to.

After taking "one last look" in the mirror and making final adjustments to hair or makeup, a long line of bridesmaids in chartreuse silk started to form. I breathed a sigh, slipped into my three-and-a-half-inch heels, and took my place. At 10 a.m. we were off. As our bridal party, 20 strong (9 bridesmaids, 9 groomsmen, and the principals), overtook the east front of the Capitol, tourists refocused their cameras from the Statue of Freedom atop the dome to our parade. I'm not sure how many summer vacation slide shows or Facebook albums we ended up in, but just in case I made it into yours, I'm the tall, fair-skinned, auburn-haired one, also known as Bridesmaid #9.

Many official photos later, our throng was on our way back to the church. More pictures. Then a few minutes to relax before go-time. Snacks, but still no coffee. And before we knew it, 12:42 p.m struck. I freshened my lipstick, reluctantly tossed aside my flip flops, and waited for my next cue.

Ten minutes to one was official line-up time. Armed with bouquet, I took my place at the front of the line to enter the sanctuary. Personally, I dislike standing in line, regardless of what for: graduation, groceries, voting. A great modern invention is the line "reservation," such as the Disneyland FASTPASS. Why couldn't I have had a wedding fast pass to hold my place while I ran to Starbucks? I could have been back for my 1:01 p.m. reservation.

Instead, I was stuck practicing the exercises we had been given to prevent locking our knees during the hour-long ceremony, and vaguely contemplating two profound questions: (1) Can I permanently lose the feeling in my middle toe? If so, are toe transplants practiced and likely to be successful? and (2) Will Ken remember our plan? Probably not. At the wedding rehearsal, we had devised a little brother-sister affirmation. The plan was that when I reached the end of the aisle and walked past him, we would bump fists, Obama-style. We had both matured quite a bit since the days when I used to meet him with a swift kick to the shin. Still, considering our history, I was a little nervous that he might leave me hanging.

Five past one: Cue bridesmaids. I ventured out and headed carefully down the aisle. One three-and-a-half-inch heel at a time. When you're already five-nine and add those extra inches, well, six feet is a long hard fall. Halfway there and no glitch. More confident of my footing, I lifted my gaze from the path in front of me to catch my big brother's eye. There was the familiar smirk: The one that used to say, "Hey, I've got an idea . . . " and usually ended with me sitting alone in my room waiting for my half of the punishment. Still not completely sure if I'd be left hanging, I kept a firm grip on my hydrangeas.

With a smile and a nod, my big brother put out his fist, just as he had promised. I smiled back and met him with my right fist. Bump. As I took my spot at the front of the church, I heard someone whisper, "That's his sister." My smile broadened, and I'm quite sure I stood just a little taller.

Kari Barbic

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the weekly Standard

Obamacare: It's Even Worse Than You Think

President Obama's strategy to pass sweeping health care legislation rested on stealth and speed. The idea was to fill the conversation for months on end with vague talk about expanding coverage, "bending the cost-curve," improving quality, and rooting out waste, without showing the public how the plan would actually work or what it would cost. Legislation, meanwhile, would be composed behind closed doors, and the bills would be introduced as close as possible to when they might come up for a vote to minimize the time in which they could actually be read and thought about by those who would vote on them and those who would live under them. By the time the details emerged, maybe momentum and being "closer than ever before" would be enough to overcome the torrent of objections that were sure to be raised when people got a real look at the nuts and bolts.

That moment has now come. House Democrats finally unveiled their plan on July 14, with the aim of passing it by July 31, the last day before the August congressional recess. The Senate's Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee has released its part of the plan, but the Finance Committee (which must figure out how to pay for it all) has yet to do so. There, too, the leadership hoped for a vote before the recess.

But things have not gone as the Democrats intended. As details have emerged, an extraordinary wave of public concern has washed over the debate and left the plan's champions reeling. It is all but certain that both the House and Senate will recess for August without voting on health care, despite the president's insistence on its urgency. And the emerging tone of the public debate casts serious doubt on the fate of Obamacare more broadly.

The reasons for the public revolt are easy to see. The Democrats want to spend $1.5 trillion over a decade, impose an $800 billion tax increase in the midst of the worst recession in a generation, increase federal borrowing by $239 billion (on top of the $11 trillion the Obama budget already requires us to borrow through 2019), impose costly mandates on employers that will discourage hiring as unemployment nears 10 percent, force individuals to buy one-size-fits-all government defined insurance, and insert the government in countless new ways between doctors and patients. All of that would occur whether or not the plan includes a "public option," which at this point it does include and which will exacerbate all of these problems.

As these facts have become clear, Obama's standing has fallen and public opinion has grown decidedly less enthusiastic for the administration's approach. The trend is likely to continue, because the details of the plan reveal that its two most serious drawbacks—its cost and the prospect of government rationing—are worse than even most of their critics have grasped.

There are massive hidden costs—and widespread disparate treatment of people—inherent in a little-understood provision of the House bill.

First, there are massive hidden costs inherent in a little-understood provision of the plan. The centerpiece of Obamacare is a new premium subsidy program. In the House bill, families with incomes up to four times the poverty level would get a fixed cap on their insurance premiums, tied to their incomes. For instance, a family whose income is twice the poverty level would pay no more than 5 percent of its total income for insurance. But providing that guarantee to all such households in America would cost far more than even the Democrats are willing to propose. The plan therefore would make subsidies available only to households getting insurance through the new "exchanges," insurance pools set up in each state as a parallel system to job-based coverage. And full-time workers in all but the smallest firms would be barred from entering the exchanges, at least for a time, so they wouldn't have access to the new entitlement.

This means that two households, identical in all respects including income, would be treated very differently depending on whether they got their insurance through the exchange or through their employer. At twice the

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poverty level, a family of four today makes $44,000. Such a family insured through an exchange would pay no more than $2,200 for a policy that could cost $12,000, so it would receive a federal subsidy totaling nearly $10,000. The family next door, meanwhile, with the same income but with health insurance provided through the workplace, would receive an implicit tax break for the $12,000 in employer paid premiums worth only $3,600. That's a bonus of more than $6,000 for being in the exchange—or a penalty of $6,000 for having employer coverage. This disparate treatment would be widespread. The Census Bureau counts 102 million people under age 65 in households with incomes between 150 and 400 percent of the poverty level, but the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that only 20 million of them would receive insurance through the exchanges in 2014.

Such disparate treatment of lower income workers would create a powerful incentive to flee employer coverage for the exchanges. And there would at the same time be pressure to extend the subsidy to workers generally satisfied with the plans provided at work but displeased about paying so much more for them than other similarly situated people. This would vastly increase the cost of the plan, since Congress is not known for resisting constituent pressure. CBO's estimates of the cost of the bill assume the barriers to a vastly larger entitlement program would hold. But the Lewin Group, a health policy consulting firm, concluded otherwise: that about 130 million people would be moved from job-based coverage to the exchanges, with most ending up in the new "public option" very quickly. So, one way or another, the bill's promise of "capped" premiums would be all but certain to become a 100 million person entitlement, which would cost several times what the CBO has so far estimated.

Doctors know best that efforts at centralized control constrain their ability to respond to the patient in front of their nose—and they are growing increasingly uneasy.

Meanwhile, it is becoming increasingly clear that Obamacare would involve not just rationed care but centrally managed and controlled care. For months, the president said he knew how to "bend the cost-curve" with painless innovations like information technology and new effectiveness research, but CBO said these simply wouldn't work. So, now, at the eleventh hour, the president is hailing a new approach—vast new powers for a board of experts in Washington to set rules and calibrate fees—as the secret to cutting costs and bringing the system under control, first within Medicare and then beyond. But in a system as complex as ours, this is a recipe for one-size-fits-all inefficiency and the shortages, misallocations, and waiting lines that come with it. This is even worse than simple rationing; it is an attempt at technocratic central planning for a country of over 300 million people.

The idea of subtle adjustments of rules and incentives to drive doctor and patient behavior is nothing new, of course. It has been tried several times in America—most notably in 1989, when an expert commission was assigned to devise a new fee schedule for Medicare that would reward general practitioners and drive more medical students to become family physicians. The group sought carefully to manipulate prices and payments to drive practitioner decisions, but the results of their efforts were exactly the opposite of their intent. Specialists have triumphed with tests and procedures, general practitioners have vanished—not just for Medicare patients but for everyone—and doctors despise the complicated fee schedule.

There is no reason to think the new council of experts would be any better able to bring America's vast and complex health care system under centralized rational control. Doctors know better than anyone that efforts at such control constrain their ability to respond to the needs of the unique patient in front of their nose—and they are growing increasingly uneasy with this element of the Obama plan, just as the general public is growing uneasy about costs.

Paying more for a great health care system might perhaps be justifiable, and there might even be a case for accepting a system worse than the one we have now in order to save money. But paying more for a worse health care system simply makes no sense—yet this is the bargain the president and his allies are proposing.

None of this means Obamacare is dead. The Democrats have some serious political muscle to flex, and they may still be able to force their plans through. Conservatives should not grow confident or careless at the sight of public opposition to liberal health care reform. Instead, they must use the August recess to clarify the problems with Obamacare to voters, and to make the case that America must not be rushed into a terrible mistake. There is time to find the right way to reform American health care, and there are good ideas out there for doing so—ideas that use competition and consumer choice to put downward pressure on prices rather than rationing care, displacing the currently happily insured, and bankrupting the government.

The next few weeks will be crucial to the future of American health care and American prosperity. Opponents of the president's proposal have managed to slow it down enough to allow for a real debate. Now they must win the argument.

—James C. Capretta & Yuval Levin

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YOUR NEW DOCTOR?

When it comes to health care, what really matters is who decides. Under reform proposals before Congress, government would take over more and more of your health care decisions. Whatever it's called—socialized medicine . . . government-run health care . . . "a public plan" . . . individual & employer mandates—it's bad medicine.

In a recent national survey* 4 out of 5 Americans were concerned that government- run health care would:

- REDUCE HEALTH CARE QUALITY
- INCREASE COSTS
- LIMIT CHOICES OF DOCTORS
- INCREASE THE FEDERAL DEFICIT

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**Washington Post*-ABC News Poll, June 18-21, 2009.

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Need a Student Loan?

Boy, does Uncle Sam have a deal for you.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

THOMAS FLUHARTY

The House Committee on Education and Labor is having a busy summer. (Everybody in Washington is having a busy summer!) Earlier this month, for example, one of its essential subunits—the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education and Healthy Families and Communities, or SECESEHFC—held lengthy hearings to determine new ways the United States Congress might accomplish one of its many important goals: the "Prevention of Bullying."

The subcommittee chairman, a congressman named Kildee, from Michigan, pointed out that last year, fully 75 percent of schools in the United States had reported an incident of bullying or worse.

"One incident is one too many," Kildee said, thoughtfully if not originally. "We must do something immediately to address this widespread problem."

With the "prevention of bullying" safely in the solution pipeline, the committee went on to do something immediately to address another widespread problem. Apparently college students are getting private loans to fund their education. Last week the committee approved a bill that will put an end to all that.

The committee's vote accelerates a process that was begun under President Clinton. In 1994, Congress approved his idea of a Direct Lending Program for students who needed to borrow money to go to college. Before then the government had merely guaranteed student loans, which were originated and serviced by private banks selected by the government. The guarantee ensured that the "private" loans made huge profits for the banks, regardless of interest rates or default rates.

Guaranteed loans are a textbook example of crony capitalism or (if you prefer) corporate socialism: The government assumes all the risk while doling out contracts to favored businesses, who then reap the profits. With student loans, the lender gets preening rights in the bargain, marketing itself as a Merchant of Dreams, a benefactor of America's youth, a sweet-tempered Mr. Jaggers to a nation of eager Pips. In truth, the only people who like the system of guaranteed loans are the student loan industry—now handling more than $90 billion a year—and the congressmen whose districts contain large numbers of people who work in the student loan industry.

Direct lending eliminates these unctuous middlemen by encouraging students to borrow money directly from the federal government. The program semi-satisfies libertarians, who dislike cronyism, and thrills liberals, who believe the noble goal of universal college education should be uncorrupted by the yuckiness of money making. Liberal backers of direct lending believe, in effect, that there's room for only one Merchant of Dreams around here, and it better be the federal government. Moreover, direct lending saves the government money—no really, it does—by reducing fees and other handling costs, savings which can then be passed on to the poor borrowers, though they never are.

The bill that passed out of committee last week completes the triumph of Clinton's program. The grandly titled Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2009 does away with the federal guarantee for student loans and brings them all under the care of Congress and the federal Department of Education, saving (say the committee's

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accountants) nearly $10 billion a year. The committee plans to rechannel more than half those savings to purposes other than financing higher education. But for a college student trying to make tuition, the most dramatic consequence is that federal direct lending will soon be the only kind of lending there is. Washington will be the lender of first and last resort.

Some students—or more likely, their parents—still take out private bank loans with no federal guarantees. This accounts for about 14 percent of the student loan market. But it's unclear how long that corner of the market can last, as the federal government slowly crowds out truly private lenders by offering customers lower interest rates, greater discounts, and easier eligibility rules. Most likely the private lenders will abandon the field altogether, and the last chance to build a genuinely competitive market in college loans will be lost.

Few will weep over that vanished opportunity—until, perhaps, they see what Congress does with the new power that has fallen into its lap. For whatever else the monopoly in direct lending accomplishes, it will greatly expand the number of young people who find themselves entangled with, and ultimately beholden to, the vast system of rewards and rebukes that the federal government has at hand. More than 65 percent of college students borrow money to go to college. That's a lot of guinea pigs.

We already have a foreshadowing of the possibilities. Congressmen are tinkerers, and they have been tinkering with federally backed student loans for years, hoping to push borrowers into doing things that congressmen find pleasing. The most interesting of their ideas was signed into law by President Bush. This shouldn't be a surprise, since by his second term Bush had proved a pretty ambitious tinkerer himself. The Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007—such big titles you have, grandma!—was designed to let college students know what they should do once they got out of school.

Student borrowers can have their federal loans forgiven after 25 years, on the condition that they make a single minimum payment every 360 days. This is already a significant inducement to acquire a federal rather than a private loan. But the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program goes a step further: You can have your loan forgiven after only 10 years, vastly reducing the total amount of money you pay for your college education—to below $5,000 in some cases—on three conditions. Your loan has to be handled directly by the government, with no contamination from private lenders; you have to meet a schedule of monthly minimum payments; and upon graduation you have to get the right kind of job.

The right kind of job turns out to be what's loosely called "public service." In common discourse *public service* is already an elastic term, used mostly as a form of self-flattery, but seldom has the euphemism been stretched quite so far as it was in Bush's bill. Work for the government, any government—whether as an actuary, a diplomat, or a teacher; a social worker, a fighter pilot, or a forklift driver—and you qualify for the loan forgiveness. You qualify, too, if you take a job with any 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization: the Wilderness Society, U.S. Public Interest Research Group, the Rainbow Coalition, the Transgender Law and Policy Institute, even, theoretically, the Heritage Foundation. It doesn't matter if you're an agitator, lawyer, lobbyist, congressional aide, or a pavement-pounder hectoring passersby into signing petitions for Greenpeace. The important thing is, you can't be helping anyone turn a profit.

The first loans won't be forgiven till 2017, so there's no telling yet how many people are taking advantage of the program or how much it will cost. But it's clearly designed to cast a very wide net. Indeed, its definition of public service is so broad that only a certain kind of graduate would be denied this splendid perk of an almost-free education: the idiot who went to work in the world of buying, selling, inventing, making, and producing.

Though Bush couldn't have known it, his program anticipated the age that dawned this January. It fits the ambitions and tastes of the Obama era, especially as summarized on several occasions by the first lady. She and her husband are perhaps the most famous student-loan borrowers in history. She speaks often of the torment of living under the debt load they had accumulated in college (Princeton, Columbia) and law school (Harvard). In remarks first reported by Byron York in *National Review*, in February 2008, she was particularly graphic. Thanks to their student loans, the Obamas found themselves "struggling to figure out how we would save for our kids."

What placed them in this position, Mrs. Obama said, was their decision to "move out of the money-making industry"—both had worked in corporate law—"into the helping industry." Again, the term "helping" is loosely defined: After leaving their law firms, he went to work for the Illinois state senate, she to Chicago city government and then a nonprofit hospital. "We left corporate America, which is a lot of what we're asking young people to do," she said.

Recently she expanded on the theme. "I went from college to law school to a big old fancy law firm," she told a group of Americorps workers, "where I was making more money than both of my parents combined." But then came a revelation. "I had to ask myself whether, if I died tomorrow, would I want this to be my legacy, working in a corporate firm, working for big companies? And when I asked myself the question, the resounding answer was, absolutely not."

How great their struggles were, and to what extent the struggles were aggravated by college-loan payments, are open questions. From the time they left their money-making days behind, according to tax returns, the Obamas never had a combined yearly gross adjusted income of less than $207,000. Usually it was much more. (During those years in the helping industry, the Obamas donated 0.9 percent of their income to charity, presumably because, as the old saying goes, "we

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gave at the office.") By 2005, Mrs. Obama alone was making $315,000 a year as an industrial helper, directing "community affairs" at her hospital. Except for the bad timing, she could have had her loan debt scrubbed by President Bush's program.

One justification for the program is that people in the helping industry need the financial help, because of their low pay. But most people would consider the Obamas' income pretty good money. It turns out that public service, even strictly defined, doesn't necessarily require financial sacrifice. Neal McCluskey and Chris Edwards, of the libertarian Cato Institute (one of those public-serving nonprofits), have tried to show that government work, including public school teaching, compares favorably with work in the private sector, whether you count wages, benefits, or both. Using data from 2004, Edwards found that the average federal worker earned an average of 56 percent more than the average employee in the real economy.

So if public servants don't need their loans forgiven any more than do debtors in the private sector, what's the point of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program? Why provide an incentive for graduates to steer clear of the private workforce? Mrs. Obama's remarks capture the spirit behind the program. The implication isn't merely that nonprofit jobs are admirable. It's that they're always and everywhere more admirable than jobs in the world of commerce.

The logic closes like a pincer: The only loans available to students will be from the government; and the only way to get the most favorable terms on the loans will be to do what the lender likes. Of course, you don't *have* to work for Greenpeace or Amnesty International or AmeriCorps. But if you don't, you'll pay every penny of your student loan, plus interest, while your friends who made the right decision won't have to do that. No one's making anyone do anything. It's not a threat, it's a nudge. It's not an ultimatum, it's a suggestion. And it's certainly not bullying. Bullying is about to be made illegal. ♦

Marxism's Main Critic

Leszek Kolakowski, 1927-2009.

BY ROGER KIMBALL

The Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski was just a few months shy of his 82nd birthday when he died at his home in Oxford on July 17, after what his daughter Agnieszka described as "a brief and very sudden illness." For anyone inclined to despair that we live in intellectually diminished times, Kolakowski provided a glittering counterexample. He was an intellectual giant. What is even more extraordinary, he was an intellectual giant whose accomplishments were widely celebrated. Kolakowski died full of honors as well as years. The coveted if often risible MacArthur "genius" award: He got that. The Kluge Prize for lifetime achievement in the humanities—a cool $1 million for that bijou: Kolakowski got that, too. Honorary degrees and lesser awards, honors, lectureships, and sundry recognitions: He received, and deserved, them all.

Kolakowski lived through and thought through the varieties of the totalitarian temptation. He was 12 when the Wehrmacht overran Poland. He witnessed the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto later in the war. In 1945, Soviet tyranny succeeded the Nazi variety, and Kolakowski grew up witnessing what a proletarian paradise looks like. Although he came of age as a professed Marxist, by the mid-1960s his disillusionment was far advanced. It was mutual, for Kolakowski found himself subject to constant police surveillance and, in 1968, was expelled from Warsaw University for "forming the opinions of young people in a direction glaringly contradictory to the dominant tendency of the development of the country."

Later that year, Kolakowski left Poland and embarked on a career in the West. He made stops at Berkeley, which gave him an opportunity to learn firsthand about and therefore despise the New Left culture of the 1960s; at Yale, where I studied with him; and the University of Chicago and Oxford, his intellectual homes for the last decades of his life.

Kolakowski is best known as a critic of Marxism and its spiritual allotropes. His magnum opus, *Main Currents of Marxism*, is a three-volume work of philosophical demolition. Sidney Hook aptly called the book "magisterial." It is typical that Kolakowski starts not with Rousseau or Hegel but with Plotinus (fl. A.D. 240) to explain the "origins of dialectic." The middle volume offers a detailed anatomy of Marx's thought, and the work concludes with a survey of 20th-century varieties, from the "Marxism in action" of Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, and Mao to the bloviating theoretical Marxism of Lukács, Sartre, and the so-called Frankfurt School (Adorno, Marcuse, et al.). "At present," Kolakowski observed, alluding to Marx's famous adage, "Marxism neither interprets the world nor changes it: it is merely a repertoire of slogans serving to organize various interests."

Main Currents demonstrates how Marxism, committed in Kolakowski's words to "the self-deification of mankind," became "the greatest fantasy of our century." It was an idea, he wrote, that "began in Promethean humanism and culminated in the monstrous

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tyranny of Stalinism." As such Marxism provides a permanently valuable admonition about the danger of utopian schemes, what Kolakowski called "the farcical aspect of human bondage." There were, as Kolakowski recognized, many aspects to that farce, as his observation that "one should be as careful about believing in a green utopia as in a red one" shows. I hope some charitably minded person sends a book by Kolakowski to Al Gore.

A corollary of Kolakowski's criticism of Marxism was his appreciation of the virtues of capitalism and the free market as indispensable enablers of freedom. "Capitalism," he noted, in 1995,

> developed spontaneously and organically from the spread of commerce. Nobody planned it, and it did not need an all-embracing ideology, whereas socialism was an ideological construction. Ultimately, capitalism is human nature at work—that is, man's greed allowed to follow its course—whereas socialism is an attempt to institutionalize and enforce fraternity. It seems obvious by now that a society in which greed is the main motivation of human action, for all of its repugnant and deplorable aspects, is incomparably better than a society based on compulsory brotherhood, whether in national or international socialism.

Main Currents of Marxism is not of historical interest only. As Kolakowski reminded us in the preface to the 2004 edition, notwithstanding the collapse of the Soviet Union, Marxism remains eminently worth studying, not least because its aspirations continue to percolate in the dreams of various utopian planners. (You needn't go to China or even Cuba: Just look at the increasingly pink and authoritarian complexion of the European Union.) As Kolakowski put it in his introduction to *My Correct Views on Everything* (2005),

> Communism was not the crazy fantasy of a few fanatics, nor the result of human stupidity and baseness; it was a real, very real part of the history of the twentieth century, and we cannot understand this history of ours without understanding communism. We cannot get rid of this specter by saying it was just "human stupidity," or "human corruptibility." The specter is stronger than the spells we cast on it. It might come back to life.

Although it is at the center of his scholarly work, the murderous tradition of Marx formed only a part of Kolakowski's intellectual portfolio. He moved with commanding ease from the intricacies of Plotinus, Augustine, and the Church Fathers through Descartes, Pascal, the English empiricists, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Bergson, Husserl, and the whole congeries of issues and figures we congregate under the rubric of Modernity and its Discontents.

Part of Kolakowski's genius was his ability to enliven even the most abstruse philosophical or theological subjects. He did this by means of things missing from most academic writing these days: clarity, humor, and existential urgency. He was blessed with a formidably logical mind and, correlatively, a style of writing that put a premium on intelligibility. He was also possessed of an uncanny appreciation for irony and paradox. This gave bite to his writing which flowed from the recognition that human life is instinct with contradiction and absurdity: for example, "the awesome paradox whereby good results may flow from evil, and evil results from good. That these two can thus support each other is a shattering fact about human experience."

The humor proceeds from the same recognition at one remove. I recommend in particular "The General Theory of Not-Gardening," reprinted in *Modernity on Endless Trial* (1990): "Those who hate gardening need a theory. Not to garden without a theory is a shallow, unworthy way of life."

Part of what made Kolakowski's reflections on freedom and its vicissitudes so fruitful was his understanding that human freedom is inextricably tied to a recognition of limits, which in the end involves a recognition of the sacred. In an interview from 1991, he argued that "mankind can never get rid of the need for religious self-identification: who am I, where did I come from, where do I fit in, why am I responsible, what does my life mean, how will I face death? Religion is a paramount aspect of human culture. Religious need cannot be ex-communicated from culture by rationalist incantation. Man does not live by reason alone."

Kolakowski showed how the tendency to believe that all human problems have a technical solution is an unfortunate inheritance from the Enlightenment—"even," he notes, "from the best aspects of the Enlightenment: from its struggle against intolerance, self-complacency, superstitions, and uncritical worship of tradition." There is much about human life that is not susceptible to human remedy or intervention. Our allegiance to the ideal of unlimited progress is, paradoxically, a dangerous moral limitation that is closely bound up with what Kolakowski calls the loss of the sacred. "With the disappearance of the sacred," he wrote,

> which imposed limits to the perfection that could be attained by the profane, arises one of the most dangerous illusions of our civilization—the illusion that there are no limits to the changes that human life can undergo, that society is "in principle" an endlessly flexible thing, and that to deny this flexibility and this perfectibility is to deny man's total autonomy and thus to deny man himself.

These are wise words, grippingly pertinent to an age conjuring with the immense technological novelties of cloning, genetic engineering, and other Promethean temptations. We pride ourselves today on our "openness" and commitment to liberal ideals, our empathy for other cultures, and our sophisticated understanding that our way of viewing the world is, after all, only our way of viewing the world. But Kolakowski reminded us that, without a prior commitment to substantive values—to an ideal of the good and (just as important) an acknowledgment of evil—openness threatens to degenerate into vacuousness. As Kolakowski argued, "The denial of 'absolute values' for the sake of both rationalist principles and

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the general spirit of openness threatens our ability to make a distinction between good and evil altogether."

Evidence of that threat is not far to seek. The large issue is one that has bedeviled liberal societies ever since there were liberal societies: that in attempting to create the maximally tolerant society, we also give scope to those who would prefer to create the maximally intolerant society. It is a curious phenomenon. Liberalism implies openness to other points of view, even those points of view whose success would destroy liberalism. Extending tolerance to those points of view is a prescription for suicide. But intolerance betrays the fundamental premise of liberalism, namely, openness.

The escape from this disease of liberalism lies in understanding that "tolerance" and "openness" must be limited by positive values if they are not to be vacuous. Our enlightened, secular society is extraordinarily accommodating to diverse points of view. But in order to continue to enjoy the luxury of freedom, we must say No to those movements that would exploit freedom only to abolish it. Our society, like every society, is founded on particular positive values—the rule of law, for example, respect for the individual, religious freedom, the separation of church and state.

Western democratic society is rooted in what Kolakowski called a "vision of the world." Part of that vision is a commitment to openness, but openness is not the same thing as moral agnosticism. "In order to defend itself," Kolakowski wrote, "the pluralist order should voice [its fundamental] values ceaselessly and loudly. There is nothing astonishing or outrageous about the fact that within the pluralist society, the defenders and enemies of its basic principles are not treated with exactly the same indifference." Given the shape of our post-Soviet, technologically infatuated world, perhaps it is that admonition, even more than his heroic demolition of Marxism, for which Leszek Kolakowski will be honored in the decades to come. ♦

Tried and Found Wanting

Tennesseeans are especially skeptical of Obamacare—with reason. BY FRED LUCAS

At the Biloxi, Mississippi, gathering of the National Governors Association in mid-July, Tennessee's Democratic governor, Phil Bredesen, told the *New York Times* he feared the Obama-backed health system overhaul would be the "mother of all unfunded mandates." He was speaking from experience. Bredesen was elected governor in 2002 to fix TennCare—the state's public option, launched in 1994 to replace Medicaid and cover the uninsured. Now, well into his second term as governor, he's still struggling to tame the monster.

You'd think those crafting the federal reform of health care would be interested.

A government-run insurance plan to compete with private insurers, after all, is a central plank of the health care bill sought by President Obama and congressional Democrats. While there has been no shortage of dire predictions of what will happen if a public option is established at the national level, there is already clear evidence of what did happen at the state level.

There are two New England states now experimenting with universal health care—Massachusetts (starting in 2006) and Maine (starting in 2003), both of which are having financial problems—but their programs are too young to be assessed as national models. Rather, it's the southern state of Tennessee that offers the most relevant experience. Its track record goes back to 1994, when TennCare was launched by Democratic governor Ned McWherter on the promise that it would save the state money, reduce costs, and increase coverage. Instead, in a decade, the program went from a budget of $2.5 billion to nearly $8 billion, became mired in litigation, and was forced to make major cuts.

Congresswoman Marsha Blackburn was a Tennessee state senator back when many of the problems began to materialize in 1999. "There is not a credible example of having brought about a cost savings and insured everyone. We have seen that in TennCare," Blackburn told me. "I just find it unconscionable that they are not talking about the lessons that they learned from the TennCare experience, the lessons that are still being learned every day from the TennCare experience."

Blackburn, a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, one of the committees that have reviewed health care legislation, had a simple enough question for Health and Human Services secretary Kathleen Sebelius. "I would like to know what lessons the administration has taken from Tennessee's experiment with 'public option' health care; a program known as TennCare," Blackburn wrote.

Sebelius wrote back tersely, "We have learned many lessons from the TennCare experience and recognize its goals, but TennCare is not a traditional public option." The brevity of the response could be chalked up to the fact that it's not in the administration's interest to engage in a dialogue about what happened in Tennessee.

TennCare was conceived primarily as a budget measure, to address the rising cost of Medicaid, the federally funded, state-administered health care program for the poor. McWherter received a Medicaid waiver in Novem-

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ber 1993 that allowed the state to leave Medicaid but use the same federal funds for its own managed care plan. The happy McWherter said after the waiver announcement, "For the first time we have the chance to provide affordable health coverage to every Tennessean without bankrupting our state." The plan pulled in the nearly 800,000 people then on Medicaid along with more than 300,000 deemed uninsured or uninsurable.

Initially nine managed care companies participated in the program, essentially as state contractors. In this sense, there was at least a private market (though not exactly a free market) component to Tennessee's experiment. That's by contrast with Obamacare, where the government would likely own and run the public option, which would only accelerate the problems, in Blackburn's view.

On January 1, 1994, the day TennCare was born, the *Commercial Appeal* in Memphis announced, "The $2.5 billion TennCare program replaces Tennessee's ballooning Medicaid program, promising more care for less money." The article quoted McWherter as saying, "Hundreds of thousands of Tennesseans who are on Medicaid or who are unable to get health insurance will have access to affordable health care under TennCare."

In a costly blow to the program, a federal court in 1996 prohibited Tennessee from reviewing the eligibility of enrollees. By 1998, enrollment had grown by 100,000, as employers moved employees into the TennCare system, which cost them less. "It was a gold plated plan and everything was covered," Blackburn said. "You had people that would leave private insurance and go to the public plan because it was free or very low cost."

In 1999, there was more bad news. A March review by PricewaterhouseCoopers found that TennCare paid health care providers 10 percent below what would be considered actuarially sound.

"Most hospitals had between 10 and 14 percent of their care delivered as charity care, indigent care, nonreimbursed care, and one of the promises of TennCare was—with this everybody is going to be in the pool," Blackburn said. "Everybody is going to be participating and have some type of health care coverage. The fact is, our hospitals have not seen the rate of their indigent or uncompensated care reduced."

The state's hospitals were being paid about 40 cents on the dollar for TennCare patients, which eventually rose to 64 cents on the dollar, said Craig Becker, president of the Tennessee Hospital Association.

In the summer of 1999, a state audit showed Tennessee was spending $6 million to insure 14,000 dead people, that 16,500 enrollees lived outside the state, and that 20 percent were not eligible to be in the program. Republican governor Don Sundquist tried to impose an income tax on the state in 2002 to cover the cost of the program (which by this time had 1.4 million enrollees), but failed to get it through.

Already four Blue Dog Democrats from Tennessee, congressmen Bart Gordon, Jim Cooper, Lincoln Davis, and John Tanner, have expressed skepticism about the Obama health plan.

After Bredesen was elected, he commissioned a report by McKinsey & Company that estimated TennCare would consume more than 90 percent of the state's normal tax growth within five years. The biggest cost: Tennessee led the nation in prescription drugs per capita.

"There wasn't a limit to the amount of prescriptions you could have," Drew Johnson, president of the Tennessee Center for Policy Research, a free-market think tank for state issues, said in an interview. He called TennCare a "good micro-example of how poorly the government-managed health care systems work."

"As a result of that, we had by far the most expensive Medicaid system in terms of percentage of the state budget and in terms of per capita expense as well," Johnson said.

Taking a mend-it-don't-end-it approach, Bredesen proposed to limit prescriptions to five per person per month, while also limiting the number of doctor visits and days in the hospital. The legislature passed these measures. But it wasn't enough, and by November 2004, Bredesen said it was time to scrap TennCare. That was not well received by interest groups such as the Tennessee Justice Center that were already engaged in litigation with the state over the program.

The governor negotiated a way to keep a dramatically scaled down TennCare in place, with fewer benefits and fewer people on the rolls. And this January, a federal court lifted the court order from 1996 that prohibited Tennessee from reviewing eligibility of enrollees. Thus, the state is eliminating up to 150,000 enrollees. TennCare estimates it spends $1.2 billion a year on covering people who are not eligible.

"By allowing TennCare to remove those individuals who are no longer eligible, the court's ruling will enable the state to reduce or avoid some of the budget reductions we otherwise would have had to make in the state's effort to balance its budget during this difficult economic period," TennCare director Darin J. Gordon said after the order. "This gives us hope that we may be able to realize savings that will help minimize cuts we will have to make."

Already four Blue Dog Democrats from Tennessee, congressmen Bart Gordon, Jim Cooper, Lincoln Davis, and John Tanner, have expressed skepticism about the Obama health plan.

Blackburn, meanwhile, has been working closely with Representative Phil Roe, a Republican from Tennessee. Back when Blackburn was a state legislator trying to figure out how to pay for TennCare, Roe was a physician working under the program.

"It is incumbent on us to look at what has happened with TennCare and to make that point with our colleagues," Blackburn said. "We knew it was a program that was too expensive to afford and that leads to comments that it's too big to fail." ♦

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The Master of Room 205

Before he was a bestselling author, Frank McCourt was an English teacher. BY KENNETH R. WEINSTEIN

Frank McCourt, who died in New York City on July 19 after a battle with melanoma, was known to millions as a late-in-life literary sensation, the author, at age 66, of *Angela's Ashes*, the 1996 Pulitzer Prize-winning account of his impoverished childhood in Limerick, Ireland. But to a few lucky thousand including myself, McCourt was Mr. McCourt, the beloved storyteller, creative writing teacher, and master of Room 205 in the old Stuyvesant High School on East 15th Street in Manhattan.

At Stuyvesant, where he taught from 1968 to 1987, McCourt was already a larger than life figure. To begin with, though several of our teachers at Stuyvesant in the late 1970s were immigrants, McCourt was the only Irish one. (Few Irish went into teaching—the remnants of the ethnic spoils system created by the party bosses sent them to the police or fire departments.) And, true to the stereotype, McCourt had a glorious brogue and the touch of blarney. He could, with a hint of exaggeration and a twinkle in the eye, turn the most mundane of human interactions into an amusing anecdote.

And we knew that, unlike most of his colleagues, he didn't dash out after school to catch the Ronkonkoma line to a quiet life in the suburbs. McCourt spent his evenings at places like the Lion's Head in Greenwich Village regaling folks like Jimmy Breslin and Pete Hamill with the tales that would later form the basis of his books. Then there was the fact that he was the brother of Malachy McCourt, a bit actor and host of a popular talk program on WMCA radio. Getting straight A's meant little in my family (like all Stuyvesant homes) because accomplishment was routinely expected, but having Malachy McCourt's brother as a teacher, that was a reason to discuss English class.

JASON SEILER

As a teacher, McCourt transcended all of this. His creative writing classes were both deeply entertaining and profoundly educational, thanks to his literary sensibilities and a unique approach to what he would have mockingly called pedagogy.

As McCourt recounted in *Teacher Man*, the 2005 memoir of his career, he developed his teaching style while starting out near the bottom of the New York City public school food chain, at McKee Vocational and Technical High School on Staten Island. After failing to gain control of his classroom through tough discipline and bawdy humor, McCourt decided that the best way to get students to focus was to get them to think about something that really interested them: themselves. Students, he noted, who did not have the slightest literary imagination when it came to the classics, were incredibly creative when it came, say, to forging excuse notes.

McCourt learned to pitch his teaching to his students, to get us to reflect on what was happening around us. The first day in class with him was like no other I experienced. Rather than starting off with a turgid lecture on sentence structure or the use of adjectives or alliteration, McCourt made a few jokes about ambitious Stuyvesant students (none of whom, he noted, would ever deign to return to teach creative writing) and told us stories that showed how we all had it easier than he did in the old country. Then, after a few words about the importance of description to writing, he asked us what we had for dinner last night. Most students, myself included, still reeling from his biting wit and tales of Irish woe, couldn't remember what we'd eaten, but the details came back to us slowly, along with an assignment to write an essay about our dinner.

Similar assignments followed, from describing dinner conversations to writing about our subway rides home and fights with our siblings and the neighborhood toughs. Those of us brave enough (and I was rarely a part of that crowd) to read our essays aloud risked being subjected to the same black humor and sarcasm—lovingly delivered with a wry smile—that would later fill the pages of *Angela's Ashes*.

McCourt's cynicism, and his occasional eruptions in traditional Irish song, had a point. Stuyvesant was the

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most elite of New York's science and math high schools, a place where, in McCourt's day, 700 entering students were selected from the 13,000 who took the grueling placement exam. But Stuyvesant was not a place for flights of fancy. Two-thirds of the students were boys, most were Jewish, and almost all were pre-professional, focused on the sciences. McCourt wanted to draw us out, to make us feel both our emotions and the magic around us, and to see, as he did, humor even in pain. My classmates from troubled backgrounds and dysfunctional homes found writing for him a means of unburdening their souls. Though thankfully free of those encumbrances, I was filled with more than my fair share of adolescent neuroses and addressed them in my assignments. Personal reflections were never subjected to McCourt's acerbic wit.

The last essay I wrote for him, for which he gave me an unheard of 96 (he was one of the last of the tough graders) was, per the assignment, a totally fictional account of the humiliation of being pelted with eggs on Halloween. While I had never been so pelted, my experience as a short, skinny 16-year-old Jewish kid from Queens left me with plenty of other assorted humiliations to draw upon. I still feel pride from his praise of the emotions I expressed in my essay.

Frank McCourt was a wonderful teacher. He wanted us to take our blinders off, reflect on the world broadly, get off the professional treadmill, and note the things around us. He was able to touch us so effectively, I suspect, because, just as he sought to escape the suffocating provincialism of Limerick, he knew many of us were seeking to escape the parochialism of our own families' lives.

But in the end, as much as he wanted to impart these gifts to us, I think—I hope—we imparted as much to him. And, for all his mocking of student ambitions, he is the one who, following his own advice, wrote about himself and left the biggest legacy of all. ♦

Know-Nothing-in-Chief

There's no evidence Obama has even a sketchy grasp of economics. BY FRED BARNES

Is President Obama an economic illiterate? Harsh as that sounds, there's growing evidence he understands little about economics and even less about economic growth or job creation. Yet, as we saw at last week's presidential press conference, he's undeterred from holding forth, with seeming confidence, on economic issues.

Obama professes to believe in free market economics. But no one expects his policies to reflect the unfettered capitalism of a Milton Friedman. That's too much to ask. Demonstrating a passing acquaintance with free market ideas and how they might be used to fight the recession—that's *not* too much to ask.

But the president talks as if free market solutions are nonexistent, and in his mind they may be. Three weeks after taking office, he said only government "has the resources to jolt our economy back into life." He hasn't retreated, in words or policies, from that view.

At his press conference, Obama endorsed a surtax on families earning more than $1 million a year to pay for his health care initiative. This is no way to get the country out of a recession. Like them or not, millionaires are the folks whose investments create growth and jobs—which are, after all, exactly what the president is hoping for.

Another tax hike—especially on top of the increased taxes on individual income, capital gains, dividends, and inheritances that Obama intends to go into effect in 2011—is sure to impede investment. It's an anti-growth measure, as those with even a sketchy grasp of economics know. But Obama doesn't appear to.

The president also spoke favorably at the press conference of taxing "risky" ventures by Wall Street investors. It wasn't clear what risky investments he had in mind. Never mind. Reckless risk-taking is hardly a problem at the moment. It's the lack of any risk-taking at all by investors that's holding back the economy.

Obama said the funds raised through his risk tax would be available for bailouts of large financial institutions whose collapse might harm the economy. Fine, but there's a smarter, simpler, and tax-free way of dealing with outfits deemed "too big to fail." It consists of requiring deeper capital reserves as they grow in size. If that solution is known to the president, he hasn't let on.

Then there's the matter of corporate profits. You'd think Obama would love profits since they nurture a robust economy and job growth and are largely responsible for the rise in the stock market last week to its loftiest point since January. And strong profits may foreshadow an economic recovery. But the president's opinion of profits ranges from ambivalent to hostile.

He declared it "a good thing" that banks are profitable again, but he couldn't leave it at that. He went on to bemoan the absence of "change in behavior and practices" among bankers. As for the "record profits" of insurance companies, he had nothing but disdain. "What's the constraint on that?" he asked, as if those profits should indeed be constrained.

A good example of Obama's economic shallowness is his unrelenting defense of the $787 billion

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"stimulus." Enacted in February, it has had minimal impact on the economy. Yet Obama has no second thoughts. He says he wouldn't change a thing about the stimulus. It has "already saved jobs and created new ones," he said at the press conference, neglecting to note that 2 million jobs—a *net* 2 million—have been lost since it was passed.

He seems oblivious to what the stimulus palpably lacks: incentives for private investment. These were a major reason (but not the only one) for Ronald Reagan's success in ending the deep recession in 1981-82. They also aided the rebound from the milder recession in 2001. In both cases, investment in the private sector led to job creation.

Obama, ignoring history, relied instead on government spending and small, one-time tax rebates (with no incentive power). Ideology may have played a role here. The stimulus was drafted by congressional Democrats, who loathe tax cuts. Obama could have insisted that tax incentives be added. He didn't. A fair conclusion: He simply doesn't understand the economic value of tax incentives.

"Tax cuts alone can't solve all of our economic problems," Obama said last winter. Nobody had said they could. This was a straw man. But tax incentives would surely have helped and might already have begun to stimulate the economy had Obama included them.

It's true that government can create jobs by funding infrastructure and other projects. But these are temporary jobs, and as we've been reminded again this year, it takes many months for government to get its act together and actually start hiring. The stimulus is nearly six months old and we're still waiting.

Nor does Obama understand the economics of business. Our corporate tax rate of 35 percent is the second highest among the major economic democracies. To avoid paying it, companies don't repatriate their overseas profits. They do this to be competitive in the global economy. Slashing the 35 percent rate would allow them to bring profits home and remain competitive abroad. This solution isn't on Obama's radar.

On the contrary, Obama has proudly proclaimed an economically counterproductive approach to overseas profits. In his address to Congress in February, he announced: "We will restore a sense of fairness and balance to our tax code by finally ending the tax breaks for corporations that ship our jobs overseas." Profits earned abroad would be taxed at 35 percent.

This makes no economic sense. Untaxed foreign profits allow companies to keep many jobs at home. Taxing those profits weakens global competitiveness. And the beneficiaries would be foreign firms that replace American companies and reap the profits Obama is eager to tax. The Obama policy means the profits go away and tax revenues vanish. Does Obama understand this? There's no evidence he does.

Listen to Obama talk about making "clean energy the profitable kind of energy" and you reach the same conclusion: When it comes to economics, he doesn't get it. His "cap and trade" policy would limit carbon emissions, drive up the costs of gasoline, electricity, and natural gas, and stifle the economy. Only then would green energy become profitable (maybe) and only so long as it continued to receive a massive government subsidy. You can't get much more uneconomic than that.

But maybe Obama can. He wants to eliminate many deductions for upper middle class and wealthy taxpayers. He's eager to spur the growth of unions, though success here is likely to slow the rate of growth and increase the rate of unemployment. He wants government to intervene more aggressively in the economy, a reliable job killer. He's asked for authority to seize any financial institution deemed (by his administration) a "systemic risk" to the economy. He thinks government can teach the private sector lessons in efficiency. That would be an historic first. He believes his budget, which triples the national debt, "lays the foundation for a secure and lasting prosperity."

Whew! And this is just what Obama has proposed in the first six months of his presidency. Obamanomics pays lip service to a free market economy. But Obama hasn't a clue what makes it work. ♦

Gates-gate

A Harvard prof versus a Cambridge cop: Who do you believe? BY MICHAEL C. MOYNIHAN

On Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge, across from the Harvard campus, the Maoist proprietors of Revolution Books provide reasonably priced pamphlets from the Revolutionary Communist Party (*Mao Tse-tung's Immortal Contributions*, $4.95) and offer for purchase "many volumes" of Stalin's writings. If the neophyte finds the jargon-laced language of dialectical materialism indecipherable, but is nevertheless determined to irritate his capitalist parents, further up Massachusetts Avenue the Center for Marxist Education, on the second floor above Teddy's Shoes, will, for a modest fee, help separate the proletarian wheat from the bourgeois chaff.

It was this atmosphere of ultra-radical chic that William F. Buckley evoked when famously declaring a preference to entrust the U.S. government to the first 400 names in the Boston telephone directory rather than the Harvard faculty.

Those not breathing the rarefied air of radical Cambridge might chuckle, but many Cantabrigians, 88 percent of whom cast a ballot for Barack Obama, consider the mock-

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ing appellation given their city, "The People's Republic," a badge of honor. The city's mayor, E. Denise Simmons, is the first black lesbian mayor in the United States, having succeeded Ken Reeves, Cambridge's first gay black mayor. The Cambridge Police Department has long tried to mirror the city's cultural and demographic shifts. As one police officer said in 1997, after the appointment of the city's first "liaison to the gay community," the Cambridge cops are as diverse as the city they serve: "[W]e have a black commissioner, female deputies, black deputies, gay officers."

It was in this tradition of progressive policing that former Cambridge police commissioner Ronny Watson, the first African American to head the department, tapped Sergeant James Crowley to teach a class on the dangers of racial profiling to young police recruits. Crowley, who has taught the seminar for five years, is by all accounts respected by colleagues of all races and, one presumes, particularly sensitive to the issue of racial discrimination. But that all changed last week, when he slapped a pair of handcuffs on Henry Louis "Skip" Gates Jr., director of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard.

The undisputed facts of the case are these: Returning from a trip to China, Gates arrived at his Cambridge home to find his front door was jammed. With the help of his driver, he attempted to pry the uncooperative door loose. A passerby observing what appeared to be a break-in in progress (Gates's house, according to media reports, was recently burgled), alerted the police, and Crowley showed up to investigate. It is at this point that Gates's and Crowley's stories diverge, though both agree that, before being arrested, Gates yelled to a gathering crowd of neighbors and police, "Is this how you treat a black man in America?"

According to the police report, Gates reacted in a "loud and tumultuous" manner, justifying his arrest on disorderly conduct. Whether or not it was appropriate to haul Gates to the police station—and a compelling case can be made that loud and boorish behavior, while inadvisable in such situations, shouldn't be an arrestable offense—is at this point largely irrelevant. Gates isn't quibbling with what constitutes "disorderly conduct," but rather maintains that he was "racially profiled" by a "rogue policeman" who "couldn't stand a black man standing up for his rights."

Despite a lack of evidence suggesting that Crowley was motivated by racial animus—he used no racist language, for instance, and is being supported by a black officer who arrived at the scene—Gates flatly claims that he "presumed that I was guilty because I was black. There was no doubt about that."

Many of Gates's defenders agree. The single-named journalist Touré, writing in *The Daily Beast*, argued that "Malcolm X's 40-year-old quote is still true: 'What do you call a black man with a Ph.D.? A nigger.'" Boston-based journalist Callie Crossley compared the incident to the case of Charles Stuart, a Bostonian who murdered his wife and told police that a "black man" had committed the crime, setting off a two-month manhunt for an invented suspect.

Cambridge has seen such cases before. It is hardly surprising that in a city—and at a university—where discussions of "institutional" racial bias proliferate, so do frequent and imprecise accusations of racism. Earlier this year, Harvard prevented an African-American student from graduating when a visiting acquaintance was implicated in a campus murder. The student, who had previously been brought up on disciplinary charges, had been "singled out," she complained to the *Boston Globe*, because "I'm black and I'm poor and I'm from New York and I walk a certain way and I keep my clothes a certain way."

When former Harvard president Lawrence Summers suggested that superstar academic Cornel West spend more time on traditional scholarship and less on recording hip-hop CDs, West accused him of racism and decamped to Princeton. It is a testament to the flimsiness of such charges that Summers went on to an important position in the Obama administration.

As in the Summers-West spat, it is important to note that Gates isn't claiming that the Cambridge police force is institutionally racist and in need of a purge. Indeed, Gates says that if Crowley "apologizes sincerely, I am willing to forgive him," and has repeatedly said that the white woman who called the police did the right thing. What is most important, he says, is that this be a "teaching moment"; a chance to disabuse Americans of the notion that we live in a "post-racial society" because of the election of Barack Obama. "America," he told an interviewer, "is just as classist and just as racist as it was the day before the elections."

In other words, pay no attention to the fact that the mayor of Cambridge, the governor of Massachusetts, and the president of the United States—all of whom have spoken out in his favor—are African American. According to Gates, that only serves to obscure the true nature of our society.

In the *Washington Post*, Lawrence Bobo, the W.E.B. Du Bois Professor of the Social Sciences at Harvard University and self-identified "best friend" of Gates, wrote that the arrest proves that "Ain't nothing post-racial about the United States of America." Editorial pages and liberal websites have picked up this theme and are littered with columns sarcastically "welcoming" the professor to the "post-racial America."

One needn't believe that America is "post-racial" to think that Gates's accusations against Crowley are both fatuous and defamatory. But it is sheerest academic fantasy to pretend that the country is still beset with endemic racism. Note that Gates-gate is the largest "racial controversy" of Obama's presidency, one that has dominated cable news and opinion pages, while consisting of a series of unfortunate events in which race isn't a clear factor.

Pace Touré, Malcolm X's aphorism is an anachronism: These days we call a black man with an advanced degree "Mr. President." ♦

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To Have and To Hold

A long overdue rethinking of detention policies in Afghanistan. BY MAX BOOT

Detention policy is one of the least discussed but most important aspects of the war in Afghanistan. The handling of prisoners gets publicity only when there is a major screw-up such as at Abu Ghraib or the smaller-scale abuses that occurred in Afghanistan in the early years of the U.S. presence there. But properly handled this can and should be a major element of any successful counterinsurgency strategy.

The French soldier Roger Trinquier, who served in Indochina and Algeria, did a good job of summing up both the pitfalls and potential of detentions in his classic text, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (1964):

> One of the first problems encountered, that of lodging the individuals arrested, will generally not have been anticipated. Prisons, designed essentially to accommodate offenders against common law, will rapidly become inadequate and will not meet our needs. We will be compelled to intern the prisoners under improvised, often deplorable conditions, which will lead to justifiable criticism our adversaries will exploit. From the beginning of hostilities, prison camps should be set up according to the conditions laid down by the Geneva Convention. They should be sufficiently large to take care of all prisoners until the end of the war.

Top U.S. leaders during the early stages of the Iraq war didn't take Trinquier's admonitions to heart. But when the surge started in 2007, those oversights began to be rectified by a commander, David Petraeus, who had coauthored a counterinsurgency manual that drew on the work of Trinquier and other eminent strategists.

The number of detainees held in Iraq by U.S. forces swelled from 14,000 to 24,000 during the course of the surge in 2007. (The figure is now down below 11,000.) But while the number held increased, complaints about abuses—and about terrorists turning prison camps into Jihad U.—decreased. This was largely a result of the changes implemented by Major General Douglas Stone, a Marine Corps reservist who brought a fresh eye to the problem when he took over Task Force 134, charged with detainee operations, in April 2007. He was helped by the fact that since the Abu Ghraib debacle in 2004 an entirely new detention camp had been built in southern Iraq (Camp Bucca), while the Camp Cropper facility near Baghdad had been upgraded and more troops (primarily military police) had been assigned to their operations.

But the way those facilities were run still left a lot to be desired. Among other steps, Stone segregated detainees based on threat level—the hardcore jihadists were moved away from the small fry so they could not influence them. Moderate Islamic leaders were brought in to preach nonviolence and to counteract jihadist indoctrination. Panels of officers were set up to review all detentions and arrange for release of prisoners deemed no longer a threat. (Tribal elders or others had to vouch for their continued good conduct, which helps explain why the recidivism rate has been extremely low.) For those still stuck behind barbed wire, family visits were not only allowed but encouraged, providing a morale boost and dispelling rumors of mistreatment. First-rate medical care was offered—equivalent to that received by U.S. troops. Educational and vocational programs were set up to keep prisoners busy and to teach them skills they could use to get a job. When I visited Camp Cropper last year, I saw an impressive array of paintings and sewing projects that the detainees were producing—some looked like they might fetch a nice price in a Manhattan art gallery.

All of this was part of a concept known as "COIN inside the wire" (COIN is the military acronym for counterinsurgency), and it is now generally acknowledged that this was a major aspect of the vast improvements that have occurred in Iraq since 2006. Nothing like it has been done in Afghanistan—yet. But it's starting to happen. Stone was just sent to Afghanistan at Petraeus's request to study American and Afghan detention operations and to make recommendations for improvements.

One of the major problems in Afghanistan is that we are not holding nearly enough detainees—only 620 or so at the Bagram Theater Internment Facility. A new detention facility at Bagram Air Base outside Kabul is almost complete and expected to open in September. Then U.S. forces will have the capacity to hold over 1,200 detainees in better conditions. That's an improvement, but it leaves capacity still inadequate given that Afghanistan is a larger country than Iraq, in both area and population, and confronts an insurgency believed to number tens of thousands of full- and part-time fighters.

If and when U.S.-led counterinsurgency operations gain irreversible momentum, lots of Taliban are expected to flip over to the government's side as happened in Iraq with the Awakening councils and the Sons of Iraq. But to gain momentum in the first place it is important to take a lot of terrorists off the streets

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(or, more accurately, off the hills)—either by killing them or by locking them up. And there is a lot to be said for the latter over the former. You can't interrogate dead men, and the massive use of firepower is sure to alienate the population even more than massive lockups.

As I discovered during a visit a few months ago, no one knows how many suspected terrorists the Afghans are holding—itself a major part of the problem. There needs to be a much better accounting of prisoners. A July 20 article in the *New York Times* cites a figure of 15,000 detainees, but this covers the country's entire prison population, most of them common criminals. Only about 350 detainees are being held at the special high-security wing of the Pul-i-Charkhi prison, which was set up with U.S. help.

The first and most urgent demand is to put a lot more suspected terrorists behind bars, while being careful to avoid the kind of backlash that would occur if U.S. troops were to start indiscriminately rounding up young men. In Iraq in 2003-04 we saw how large-scale sweeps and detentions can alienate the population, but we also saw in 2007-08 how targeted operations based on good intelligence can dramatically improve a situation by taking hardened killers off the streets. That kind of intelligence can be generated only by having troops live in small outposts among the people, something that is only now starting to happen in some of the most insurgent-infested areas of southern and eastern Afghanistan.

The second and equally urgent demand is to improve detention operations so that larger numbers of detainees can be held securely and safely—and ensure that those who are eventually released don't come out more embittered and better versed in the dark arts of destruction than when they went in.

There are daunting obstacles in the way of accomplishing these urgent objectives. The biggest problem is the lack of Afghan government capacity. There are not nearly enough judges, lawyers, or prison guards, and the ones who exist are too often corrupt, incompetent, and unprofessional. A dramatic indication of the problem was the fact that the Taliban were able to raid a major prison in Kandahar a year ago, freeing hundreds of their compatriots. Iraq had (and still has) many of these same issues, but they were somewhat alleviated by an American Rule-of-Law Task Force which built court houses, trained prison guards and judges, and undertook other steps to boost Iraqi capacity. No such large-scale effort has yet been undertaken in Afghanistan.

There is another obstacle in Afghanistan that we didn't face in Iraq. That would be NATO. Our European allies are so wary of being involved in "another Abu Ghraib" that they have gone to the extreme of refusing to take part in detention operations altogether. Troops operating under the NATO mandate—that is, almost all foreign troops in Afghanistan, including almost all Americans—are allowed to hold detainees for only 96 hours. Then they have to either release them or turn them over to the Afghans. Neither choice is a good one. As one officer at Task Force Guardian, the U.S. unit in charge of detention operations, told me, "With the NATO policy the Taliban have a sanctuary right here in Afghanistan." Troops I talked to in southern Afghanistan complained of a "catch and release" policy, with U.S. detention officials accepting only "high value targets." Many lower-level detainees had to be cut loose even if they were still dangerous.

The final problem is the U.S. courts. Already one federal judge has given Bagram detainees captured outside Afghanistan the right to challenge their detention in habeas corpus proceedings in American courts. If this precedent stands and expands, it could put at risk the entire war effort. Troops cannot effectively fight a massive insurgency if bound to observe the same constitutional protections we extend to criminal suspects at home. They need to have the authority to lock up those deemed a threat, often on the basis of secret intelligence that can't be shared with the accused, even if there is no evidence "beyond a reasonable doubt" to convict them in a court of law.

But assuming that the Supreme Court doesn't simply take charge of the entire detention operation, the other problems are hardly insuperable. The United States can dual-hat American troops to give them the authority under Operation Enduring Freedom to hold detainees indefinitely, as occurred in Iraq. We can also work with the Afghans to boost their own capacity to adjudicate cases and to hold terrorism suspects.

The bad news is that during the seven-plus years we've been fighting in Afghanistan these steps still have not been taken. The good news is that the new leadership team—General Stanley McChrystal in Kabul, General David Petraeus at Central Command, and Admiral James Stavridis at NATO—understands the place of detention operations within a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy and is starting to address the problems. Better late than never. ♦

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The Cocktail Renaissance

Cheers!

By Robert Messenger

The cocktail is a lovely simple thing: a mixture of spirits and flavorings that whets the appetite, pleases the eye, and stimulates the mind. It is one of our conspicuous contributions to cultured living, up there with the Great American Songbook and the tuxedo. Yet, like almost everything else to do with culture in this country, the cocktail fell on hard times in the 1960s. A generation preferred other intoxicants and, when they drank, took their alcohol in sickly sweet concoctions that defied any idea of sophistication. As time passed, the places one could order a decent cocktail grew farther in between. By the 1990s, few establishments outside of the fustiest hotels could produce a passable Martini or Manhattan. Fewer still a Negroni, a Jack Rose, or a Sazerac.

Some of it is the ignorance of the folks behind the bar, who not only have a limited mastery of the ratios that make such cocktails refreshing but also fail to measure—every drink should be meted out accurately with jiggers and spoons. It is a profession after all dominated by disabused actors and women comfortable in brief attire. But it is just as much the lack of audience. For a Negroni, your sweet vermouth and your Campari must be fresh, used and replaced regularly. For a Jack Rose, you not only need bottled-in-bond applejack or high-grade Calvados, but also real grenadine, which at this point you must make yourself as the product sold domestically has no pomegranates in it. And a Sazerac? To make the signature drink of New Orleans, you need not only good rye and an absinthe substitute, but a bottle of Antoine Amedie Peychaud's anise-dominated bitters. You need, in other words, fresh ingredients, a fair amount of knowledge, and practiced skills.

THE OLD-FASHIONED

These are the things that we have come to expect when ordering the braised veal shank in a better restaurant. The kitchen will be run by a professional—these days likely a well-educated and well-trained one. But at the bar, there is no guarantor of equal excellence. People often get bartending jobs because they once had bartending jobs. There is no comprehensive training, and you just don't know what you are going to get at a lot of places when you order a preprandial knockback. This magazine is published out of Washington, D.C., which has a characteristic cocktail: the Gin Rickey—named, yes, for a lobbyist. It's just lime juice, gin, and grenadine, topped off by club soda. It's one of the finest of the tall, cool drinks and as close as D.C. comes to having a notable food item. Yet when I've ordered one against the summer heat, bartenders have threatened me with concoctions including fruit juices and syrups, sugar, and all too little fresh carbonated water. Don't make the mistake of ordering one without quizzing the mixmaster on what he thinks goes in a Rickey.

There was a revival of the Martini in the middle 1990s, brought on by a craze for swing dancing and ring-a-ding-ding bachelor culture. But the best cocktails were not the product of the 1950s when the Rat Pack set the standard, but the 1920s when piano bars and hot jazz ruled and people changed their clothes for the evening. Our most elegant cocktails were part of the great modern revolution in design and had the same sleek lines as that era's airplanes and motorcars. The drink names of this era celebrate just what the plane, train, and liner meant to travel and horizons—the Aviation, the Bijou, the Metropolitan, and the Sidecar; the Havana, the Bombay, the Honolulu. And these drinks were wondrous balances of fresh ingredients. During the "Swingers" era of the 1990s, what you could get were very large Martinis that

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL PARASKEVAS / OPPOSITE, FROM GIBSON PHOTOGRAPH BY SAM VASFI

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were often just chilled gin—six ounces or more in a single glass. It wasn't uncommon to see one made by spraying the tiniest amount of vermouth into a frozen glass and adding the gin on top. Bartenders would proclaim the benefits of not diluting the alcohol by shaking or stirring it over ice.

Well, diluting the alcohol is much of the point of the cocktail. Do not underestimate the value of water in cocktails. It is what separates us from our less-civilized forebears who began the consumption of distilled spirits. The meeting of water with alcohol and flavorings civilizes the mix, allowing the spirit's rich flavors to prosper and diminishing the harsh bite of the liquor—which is after all something of an industrial byproduct. The key to making cocktails in large batches and ahead of time is to pour in water before chilling the mixture in a pitcher. It is a difficult moment, I acknowledge: a plunge into the unknown accompanied by a sense of impending disaster. But have faith and you will be rewarded. The only people who you don't want adding water to your drink are those who do it the most frequently: distillers. Many spirits are watered down from their natural alcohol level just before bottling. It's the reason to buy high-proof spirits—"bottled in bond" is a term to look for with American brown liquor—whenever you can. You can then water them down at your leisure. I generally suggest twice before dinner.

There are only a tiny number of foundational cocktail recipes: the Martini, the Manhattan, the Old-Fashioned, and the Daiquiri.

The byproducts of the "Swingers" years were innumerable varieties of flavored vodka and the cocktail menu, which graces even chain restaurants these days. Here will be your Smore'tini, your Stoli Blueberry Lemon Drop, your Cucumber Collins, and your Ruby Red Bull (from the first four hits that came up when I typed "cocktail menu" into Google). Such cocktails are a curate's egg of ingredients—only one of which you will ever be able to taste—backed by a heavy dose of some so-called premium liquor: Stoli Vanil, Grey Goose, Tanqueray Ten, Skyy. Many of these concoctions have the name of a classic cocktail, but just you try saying: "I see you make a Strawberry Caipirinha, any chance you could make me a Caipirinha?" What's lacking is any skill or knowledge behind the menu—and likely most of the ingredients that make a drink like a Caipirinha work. Tiki drinks are the butt of jokes these days, but Trader Vic Bergeron and Donn Beach were brilliant drinkmakers. A huge portion of their inventions aren't really to my taste, but I'm ever happy to hoist a fresh Mai Tai to the memory of these men. It may be kitsch but it began in skill, as anyone who has ever tried to replicate a winning Zombie or Piña Colada knows.

Bergeron and Beach were professionals in control of their venues—just like a good chef at the pass of his kitchen. They could make anything, and you could feel safe ordering your heart's desire in their bars. Every so often I'm in a random hotel bar or some downtown grill and see a fancy drinks list and order one of the very simple classics like an Old-Fashioned or a Daiquiri. These are things anyone should be able to make and involve only the simplest of ingredients. An Old-Fashioned is a sugar cube wetted down with two to three large dashes of Angostura bitters and crushed until no trace of the crystals remains. Add some water—not much, the amount depends on the quality of your brown—two ounces of excellent rye whiskey (or bourbon, of course), and three cubes of ice. Stir and let it sit for a moment while you slice a nice stripe of lemon peel—all peel, none of the white pith—to squeeze over. (You'll see the slick of citrus oil as you raise the glass for your first sip.) It's perfection incarnate. Yet if you order one in that random bar, the likelihood is that you'll be brought something involving simple syrup, club soda, maraschino cherries, orange slices, too much ice, and good god knows what else.

We've forgotten where we came from. The names of many cocktails survive, but what they are sits in a realm of hazy inexactitude. The highly reputable drinks writer of the *Wall Street Journal* not long ago implied that "fresh orange slices" were essential to an Old-Fashioned, which may have been true during Prohibition with the rotten liquor, but wasn't when the drink was born and isn't today. What makes the confusion in this case almost amusing is that the Old-Fashioned originated in purists' rejection of the fancy concoctions of the 1870s—when the modern cocktail was truly born—by ordering an "old-fashioned whiskey cocktail," that is, one without all the syrups, fruit juices, and wines. But, one of the things that makes this true beauty is that you can vary it in endless ways, not with extra ingredients but with different types of alcohol and different bitters. Old-Fashioneds are splendid with the more aromatic gins and aged rums. I make them with Armagnac and with Calvados, or with Laird's worth-any-search bottled-in-bond Straight Apple Brandy. The basic recipe is just that. And there's the rub. There are only a tiny number of foundational cocktail recipes: the Martini, the Manhattan, the Old-Fashioned, and the Daiquiri. Making these well is just something to master: like the sound of Bessie Smith's voice, how to carve a turkey, and the order of the Triple Crown races.

What's more, even these obey the simplest of princi-

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ples: One of Sour, Two of Sweet, Three of Strong, Four of Weak. This is a baseline ratio for all cocktails. The weak is, of course, water—most particularly ice. You shake or stir not just to chill your drink, but to improve its balance with a bit of melted ice. Strong is the liquor—in most cocktails at least two ounces of this good stuff, though varied to taste. I base all my cocktails on two ounces of the main spirit, as it keeps me from making mistakes as the accessories go in, but you can do just as well at 1.5 or 2.5. Sweet is sugar, most often diluted in water as simple syrup. (Easily made at home by warming an equal amount of sugar and water until the sugar is dissolved, then storing in the fridge.) Sour is just about anything from citrus juice and aromatic bitters like Angostura to vermouth and the complex bitter liqueurs of Italy. Follow these principles, and you'll likely prepare a decent drink from the ingredients to hand. Just as you can sub parsley for any herb in cooking, you can substitute in cocktail making. Make a Martini with bitters instead of vermouth—it's called a Pink Gin. Make a Daiquiri with grapefruit instead of lime—sometimes called a Hemingway, though that name conjures as many cocktails as there are bars in the world. Make a Manhattan with brandy instead of rye—oft called a Charles Cocktail. Put a single splash of Angostura in a Daiquiri and then try one with orange bitters. It's all to the good. You're rolling your own.

THE MARTINI

In the cocktail world, the phrase "roll your own" is indelibly associated with David Embury, whose *Fine Art of Mixing Drinks* (1948, revised 1952 and 1958) remains the single best book on the subject. Embury (1886–1960) was a successful New York tax attorney, who, according to his daughter Ruth, excelled "at everything he did. Besides being a lawyer and cocktail aficionado, he was a magician and bridge expert, and played both the piano and banjo." He was the classic amateur and in that spirit sought to understand the cocktail's principles. Embury broke a drink down into three constituent parts—the base, the modifying agent, and the special flavoring and coloring agents. The base is our "strong," the alcohol, which to Embury should constitute 75 percent of any drink and never less than 50 percent. (In a drink like a Martini, it will be upwards of 90 percent.) The modifiers are our "weak" and "sour," as well as "smoothing agents" like sugar and egg whites. These will be most of the rest of a drink's volume with only tiny additions of the liqueurs and fruit syrups that constitute "special flavoring and coloring agents." From this simple description, Embury was able to explain all cocktails as a matter of proportion. What is a traditional Daiquiri? Nothing but 8 parts Cuban rum, 2 parts lime juice, and 1 part sugar syrup. Embury took it to heart that you would never be mixing up a single cocktail, but likely four or eight, and proportions gave you the power to make a good cocktail for your guests that, equally important, tastes the same each round.

But Embury was concerned about more than just how to make good cocktails—he sought to define just what one was. He found six key characteristics:

■ First: It "must whet the appetite, not dull it." This sounds simple enough but actually disqualifies whole swaths of alcoholic drinks from consideration and leaves us focused on the dry and sour drinks that show off a spirit. Nothing served at a rowdy bar could ever qualify. Nor anything that disguises the taste of the liquor; it would cloy and dull your palate and hardly be the lead in to a decent oyster pan roast and some lamb chops. Embury's focus was on quality not quantity—though he did describe himself as someone who prefers to drink the first too fast and then savor the second. He was, moreover, asserting that the cocktail is a thing of its time and place, holding a key spot in the day's endeavors: after the labor and before the meal. It's a reward, but like a good dinner it takes a bit of effort to prepare.

■ Second: A cocktail "should stimulate the mind as well as the appetite." Embury understood that cocktails are part of a civilized and contemplative life. You should be able to anticipate your first drink after the day's work and use it to refresh your spirit and relax your mind. It should awaken senses dulled at the office and by the speed and distances of contemporary life. It should move you from the determined needs of a workday to a thoughtful consideration of the better and more charming aspects of living and talking and reading. Anticipation should not be underrated as an aspect of any aesthetic experience. It is as essential to a cocktail as it is to a good production of *Cymbeline* or *Don Carlos* or a cassoulet.

■ Third: A cocktail "must be pleasing to the palate." By this, Embury meant a drink that is dry with all of the flavors balanced. You should be able to sense every ingredient in a well-made cocktail. Some of it might be elusive, but it is there in some definable sense. When you add one or two drops of absinthe to a Corpse Reviver No. 2, you are adding

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a defining flavor. You cannot leave it out without changing the drink into something else.

■ Fourth: A cocktail "must be pleasing to the eye." This is an underrated virtue. At a many-starred hotel, I was recently brought a rather good Negroni in a brown-tinted old-fashioned glass. It came close to ruining the moment. The bright red color is one of the pleasures of this masterpiece, shining out from an up glass close to one's right hand. Bringing a tray of four Pegu Clubs to your coffee table will liven up your guests, setting everyone to considering the drinks and their color. Like wrapped packages and Christmas crackers, well-presented cocktails add festivity to an occasion. One trouble is that old saw about shaken versus stirred. James Bond has no idea what he is talking about. Nobody wants a shaken Martini, which is a cloudy drink when a Martini should be absolutely clear. Stir it with a long spoon until it is rabidly cold. Shaken or stirred is a debate about how a drink should look, not how it should taste. Any drink with fruit juice in it will be cloudy, so shake away—shaking being the most efficient method of chilling. If your drink has any hope of being clear: stir. And anyone who mentions the concept of bruising alcohol should be offered a beer to drink.

■ Fifth: A cocktail "must have sufficient alcoholic flavor." Even the simplest of cocktails like a vermouth cassis must taste of alcohol. If you don't like the taste of the stuff, drink soda water. There's nothing else to say. Drinks that don't taste of alcohol were developed for coeds and the saps who try to get them drunk. There are cocktails for every palate, and every cocktail is adjustable. If you don't like bitter herbs, make a Negroni with simple syrup substituted for a quarter of the Campari. A cocktail tailored to your palate will still taste wonderfully of the alcohol. A cocktail that does not taste of its alcohol is likely something disreputable.

■ Finally: A cocktail "must be well-iced." This rules out most of the drinks you can get in American restaurants, as they are too large. A cocktail is about four ounces, and today's Martini is six, maybe even eight. It's warm before you can contemplate its measure. The chill is essential. Cocktails do not open up like wine, they just get warm. Plan on more than one round and consider steps like chilling your shaker and making ice cubes from distilled water. (Better ice is an overlooked way to improve cocktails—it's a lot like making your own stock and pie crusts.) But regardless, serving smaller drinks at colder temperatures is as essential as not overcooking the trout.

There isn't any part of the cocktail process that Embury didn't examine in *Fine Art*, from glassware and the strength of drinks to whether you should mix liquors and the "Social Effects of Overindulgence." His belief that you should cut the amount of water in a cocktail to the bone meant that his simple syrup is three parts sugar to one part water—a thick additive that experimentation showed him had the maximum sugar he could get into water without its returning later to crystal form. His assured manner left plenty to argue about: the ratio of his Sours (far too much brandy in the Embury Sidecar, for instance), the base of the French 75 (he favors cognac rather than gin), even the number of foundational cocktails. He presented six, adding the Sidecar and the Jack Rose. Now, I love both those drinks, but what are they other than a Brandy Sour and an Applejack Sour in exactly the way a Daiquiri is a Rum Sour: the foundational Sour? They are brilliant variations, not pillars. Embury is our one true philosopher of the cocktail, and the conversation never flags.

Fine Art of Mixing Drinks is not just the best modern book on cocktails. For years it has also been the grail of aficionados. When found, copies were in the hundreds of dollars. (A book dealer of my acquaintance paid $200 for one a year ago.) For close to a decade I had only a photocopy until chance and increased income came together. Into this breach has stepped Greg Boehm. While many of us wanted Embury to be in print, Boehm went to the trouble of tracking down Embury's daughter Ruth and acquiring the copyright. (She was hard to find he told me and "had no idea that her father was a legend.") Boehm comes from a successful publishing family and is proprietor of the small Mud Puddle Books, which he wants to make the "major publisher of cocktail books in the world." Ten years ago at Salvatore Calabrese's legendary Library Bar in the Lanesborough Hotel in London he discovered how good a cocktail can be. Wanting to learn more, he began buying old cocktail books and ended up with so many that he started selling duplicates on eBay. (He has the largest collection of cocktail books in the United States, though he points out this is mainly because the one larger collection was sold to a guy in Germany.) One day, a woman named Audrey Saunders bought one, and he emailed her to say he had other cocktail books if she had any interest. She did. So was a friendship born and the path to Mud Puddle struck out upon.

Saunders is the proprietor of the Pegu Club in New York and one of the catalysts behind the city's serious cocktail culture. Boehm fell in with her merry group of classic drink revivalists and soon opened his library of 2,000 books to the city's bartenders and aficionados. Bringing them back into print was the next step. Last summer, Mud Puddle published facsimile editions of six of the most important books in cocktail history: *How to Mix Drinks; A Bon Vivant's Companion* by Jerry Thomas (1862), *Modern Bartender's Guide* by O.H. Byron (1884), *The Mixicologist* by C.F. Lawlor (1895), *American and Other Iced Drinks* by Charlie Paul (1895), *Bartenders' Manual* by Harry Johnson (1900), and *Barflies and*

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Cocktails by Harry McElhone (1927). Then in October came the long-awaited Embury reprint. For $29.95 you can now acquire *Fine Art* at the click of a button day or night. Boehm has 22 more titles in the pipeline—this summer's releases are six delectable gems: *Modern American Drinks* by George J. Kappelar (1895), *The World's Drinks and How to Mix Them* by William Boothby (1908), *Drinks* by Jacques Straub (1914), *Recipes for Mixed Drinks* by Hugo R. Ensslin (1917), *Cocktails: How to Mix Them* by Robert Vermeire (1922), and *The Artistry of Mixing Drinks* by Frank Meier (1936)—and the folks he is working with read like a who's who of the better bartenders and cocktail writers in contemporary America: Saunders, Dale DeGroff, David Wondrich, Ted Haigh.

It is with them that we pick up the thread of our story. For things started changing for the cocktail about five years ago. It wasn't a fad or some new cocktail craze but something I think might be better termed a "renaissance," for it is a rediscovery of antique knowledge. It began in our high-end restaurants, particularly venues like the Gramercy Tavern and Chez Panisse. A large percentage of profits in such restaurants comes not from the food but from the beverages that accompany it. (It used to be joked that McDonald's sold hamburgers to get you to buy Coke. Well, our better restaurants sell braised porkbelly in the hopes that you will buy first-rate Pinot Noir.) Just as these restaurants were educating an urban audience to eat frisée and sweetbreads and to drink Argentine Malbec and Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, so they eventually began to encourage some chef-like flourishes behind their bars.

THE DAIQUIRI

The "Swingers" craze, too, had beneficial side effects. Restaurateurs discovered that people would drink anything called a "Martini," and various classic cocktails reappeared under that name—you could suddenly get Manhattans made properly with rye whiskey under the campy name of a Wry Martini, and the heavily marketed Hennessey Martini was nothing but a Sidecar in disguise. Equally important was the irresistible rise of the Cosmopolitan, which convinced a couple of generations of young women to drink cocktails. The much-debated origins of this drink are irrelevant; what matters is that a combination of vodka—most often citrus-flavored—orange liqueur, cranberry juice, and lime juice in the tall, clear architecture of the Martini glass became immensely popular. And then it did something much more unusual: It became a standard. This hadn't happened in decades. (That its name already sounded like a classic may have helped.) It was a gateway drug, and, as women are the ever hoped-for, prayed-for, marketed-to-at-any-cost growth market of liquor companies, the news was spread rapidly by the vodka reps. While women were busy splashing pink liquid on their dates—very hard to drink eight ounces or more of booze out of a Martini glass while standing in a crowded bar—men had been busy discovering the greatness of single-malt Scotch. This in turn led our makers of Kentucky's finest spirit to point out that all straight bourbon was essentially single malt and bring to market some stunning new brown liquors.

Out of this sudden interest in serious booze—and backed by restaurateurs who saw a good source of profit—sprang a generation of bartenders who cared about the history of their profession and the quality of their ingredients. As with chefs in the 1970s and 1980s taking a stage at the restaurants of the Brothers Troisgros, Alain Chapel, or Frédy Girardet, bartenders were collecting the old cocktail manuals and banding together at spots like the Rainbow Room and Firebird in New York, where they worked under the tutelage of the godfather of the cocktail renaissance: Dale DeGroff. In the late 1980s, DeGroff had been charged with creating a classic cocktail menu at Joe Baum's Aurora (and again at the fabled Rainbow Room). A skilled professional bartender, DeGroff was suddenly an archivist and inventor as well. He had to track down old recipes and create modern equivalents for long-defunct ingredients.

DeGroff's progeny went off to create bar programs at restaurants around the country and to found lovely little lounges of their own. In most of the major American cities today, you will find a place that specializes in good drinks and a cozy atmosphere: places like Saunders's Pegu Club or Death & Co. in New York, Restaurant Eugene in Atlanta, the Violet Hour in Chicago, Alembic in San Francisco, and The Gibson and PX in Washington, D.C. Here the bartend-

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ers do things like make their own ginger beer and vermouth; macerate sour cherries and infuse spirits with ginger; distill their own celery and kumquat bitters; and of course flame lemon peels before your eyes. The results show in every glass. And just like the chefs of the 1970s who, needing good goat cheese and baby arugula and squab, found courageous foodies to build purveying businesses, we now have a number of boutique producers of cocktail ingredients, a new generation of distillers getting going, and a wild cocktail subculture. (There's also been a sudden uptick of molecular mixology—bacon-infused bourbon, a Sazerac gummy bear, Red Bull foam, and the much-discussed Pisco Sour Marshmallow—but I assure you, despite the fascination newspaper editors seem to have with these antics, they are as much a fad as they are foolish.)

Charles Rolls, who revived the classic Plymouth gin brand in the late 1990s—he was bought out by Absolut in 2001—started up Fever-Tree to bring you a decent tonic water, one not dominated by high-fructose corn syrup like Schweppes or Canada Dry. Why buy a premium spirit, he wondered, if you're going to add mediocre sugarwater? His stuff is magic. Made from cane sugar, Sicilian lemons, African marigolds, and hand-pressed Tanzanian orange oil, it tastes deeply of quinine. Yet an equally good tonic is made by Jordan Silbert at Q Tonic, and it lacks almost any quinine bite. Silbert uses agave nectar instead of sugar, and Q Tonic is notably sharp. With two other artisanal tonics now on the market—Stirrings and Fentimans—it's like the days when D'Artagnan suddenly made Magret duck available in every big city in America. And then there's the Internet, which Greg Boehm points out turned his cocktail books from a novelty into a working library. Online you could track down missing ingredients and order all sorts of odd products. Want to make your own tonic? You can order citric acid and cinchona bark online. Need Kina Lillet, Bols, or real grenadine? Pull out your credit card and watch for the UPS man. The Internet proved there was a market for such things, and businesses responded.

Eric Seed is the owner of a Minnesota-based importer—Haus Alpenz—that is devoted to tracking down the lost ingredients of the classic cocktails: things like Pimento Dram, Velvet Falernum, and Batavian Arrack. His business is connecting boutique producers with top restaurants. He finds the unusual ingredients that serious bartenders need to feed their fancies and guarantees the steady supply that makes educating consumers worthwhile. The wonder of last winter was the Dolin Vermouths de Chambéry that he's brought back to America. Made according to the same recipe since 1821, they have a wondrous freshness that simply banishes any thought of using Cinzano or Noilly-Prat. All three—a dry, a blanc, and a rouge—are worth drinking on their own. For years we have been merrily adding something we wouldn't drink straight to our favorite gin or whiskey. The mind reels.

In 2007, Seed tracked down a source for crème de violette—a pale blue liquor made by macerating violets in brandy—which put the long-lost Aviation (8 parts gin, 2 parts lemon juice, 1 part crème de violette, 1 part maraschino liqueur) on cocktail menus around the country. (It's been so successful that spirits entrepreneur Rob Cooper has revived Crème Yvette, another long-defunct violet-based liqueur.) Last summer, Seed began importing an Old Tom gin from Hayman's, the oldest family-owned gin distillery in England. (It was thanks to interest from the cocktail revivalists that Hayman's again began producing it from the old family recipe.)

There is an amazing array of new products in America's liquor stores.

Old Tom is the missing link of the gin world. When the first great cocktails were being created in the middle of the 19th century, gin was a range of spirits, not just the London Dry that we know and love today. At the other end of the spectrum is Holland gin, or genever, a much sweeter spirit than London Dry. Old Tom sits squarely in between. The original Martini—the Martinez—called for Old Tom, as did a Tom Collins. (The John Collins wants genever.) The fine Silver Cocktail is best with no sugar and Old Tom—4 parts gin, 4 parts dry vermouth, 1 part maraschino liqueur, two dashes orange bitters, shaken and served with a lemon peel.

Seed believes that the revival of such cocktails is not part of some fad, but just the next step in our culinary revolution. Beverages represent the largest share of a restaurant's profits, and crafted cocktails and a serious bar program are the natural extension. "Diners want something exciting at each and every step of the meal," notes Seed, and the cocktail renaissance is being driven by restaurants' evolving to provide a full dining experience. The best parallel is again with what happened in the kitchens of America in the 1970s and 1980s. The businesses that sprang up to meet the needs of adventurous chefs soon turned to the home market. So it is that a product like the Rothman and Winter crème de violette Seed found for his restaurant and bar clients, soon went into the specialized liquor stores that cater to us cocktail geeks.

There is an amazing array of new products in America's liquor stores. For decades, there were only two brands of rye on the market—Old Overholt and Jim Beam rye. Both were a perfectly acceptable base for a Manhattan, yet at this present moment I have four bottles of rye on my shelves and nary a Beam or Overholt in sight. There are remarkable new spirits

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like the Anchor Steam brewery's Old Junípero gin and Portland's Aviation gin, and you'd have a hard time convincing me that George T. Stagg—part of the Buffalo Trace Antique collection of bourbons—isn't simply the greatest spirit ever crafted by American hands. And this is to say nothing of the bitters revolution that began with Gary Regan's Orange Bitters No. 6. Where once was just Angostura, you will now see a dozen little bottles.

Restaurants taking a chance on a cocktail program, moreover, restored the profession of tending bar. As Seed points out, for restaurants, "Cash flow is everything. You need to turn your inventory, which means you need people to educate your clientele." Restaurateurs are suddenly keen for their cocktail-interested staffers to spend time encouraging the customers to try a Clover Club or a Blood and Sand. As more cocktail revivalists followed their inclination to the other side of the bar, more good lounges opened and more people had a great cocktail. Like the rock Sisyphus pushed up the hill, the cocktail revival is suddenly rolling. The *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post* both hired first-rate cocktail columnists. Websites have sprung up compiling information on every facet of cocktail history and every kind of spirit. (Ted Haigh and Martin Doudoroff's Internet Cocktail Database is a particularly notable compendium of drinks and ingredients lost and found, and includes a random cocktail generator based on Embury's theories.) There's even an annual New Orleans drinkathon that passes as a convention, called Tales of the Cocktail, where the likeminded gather to drink, er, attend sessions on "The Scented Trail: Techniques on How to Develop Aroma in Your Cocktails" and "Making Your Own Spirits: A Look into Modern Nano-Distilling." Cocktails are a viable business in 2009.

THE MANHATTAN

There's no better case in point of the new bar professionalism than D.C.'s Derek Brown—the man who first pushed Eric Seed to seek out the Dolin vermouths. He grew fascinated by the drinks trade early and worked as the sommelier in some of D.C.'s best restaurants. Yet his heart remained more behind the bar than in the cellar. The beautiful revival speakeasy The Gibson is now his stage, and its owners have faith their investment will pay off—they spent about $200,000 renovating a ground-floor space into a dark, wood-paneled dream. There are only 48 seats and, if one isn't open, you won't be welcome to loiter until one is. The new cocktail lounges are all about preserving a comfortable atmosphere for drinks and conversation. (Milk & Honey in New York, one of the best spots in America for the classic cocktail drinker, has a famous set of rules, including the wonderful instruction to its female patrons, "If a man you don't know speaks to you, please lift your chin slightly and ignore him." My favorite: "Do not bring anyone unless you would leave that person alone in your home.")

To watch Brown at work behind the bar is to see an artist among his elements. There's showmanship—the double old-fashioned glass spun four feet in the air to spread the absinthe for each Sazerac—and a glorious preference for flaming lemon peels to finish a drink. (Brown wonders what would be the point of coming to work if you can't light things on fire.) The ease of action almost belies how much prep work is behind each of the cocktails and how much experimentation went into honing each recipe. The Gibson is the perfect place to give thanks for the cocktail renaissance. Begin with a Sazerac or a Martini in a nod to where we came from. Then try a classic variation. If you went brown, I'd suggest the Vieux Carré (rye, brandy, sweet vermouth, Benedictine, Peychauds and Angostura bitters) or a Boothby, the great San Francisco barman William "Cocktail" Boothby's 1908 idea of a Manhattan—rye, Carpano Antica, bitters, and champagne. If you started out with clear, order up one of the cousins of the modern Martini: the Fifty-Fifty (equal parts gin and dry vermouth: the clearest, cleanest drink I've ever been served) or Brown's version of the Improved Gin Cocktail (gin, maraschino liqueur, and ale bitters).

Better yet, stop back by for an after-dinner treat like Brown's reinvention of the Pisco Sour, the Salad Days Sour (celery-infused pisco, lemon juice, celery bitters, and burnt cinnamon), or his Rhum Manhattan (Neisson Rhum Agricole Réserve Spéciale, Carpano Antica, and orange bitters). As Brown likes to quote Hemingway: "Dessert is for people who don't drink enough." ♦

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Jaded But Wise

An ancient school teaches us moderns.

'Diogenes,' 1905, by John William Waterhouse

BY LAWRENCE KLEPP

The third-century B.C. philosopher Diogenes the Cynic was, arguably, Western civilization's first Marx Brother. He is known not for metaphysical treatises but for wisecracks and pranks.

Alexander the Great hears of this strange philosopher who lives outdoors on next to nothing and comes to see him, asking if there's anything Alexander can do for him: "Yes, get out of my sunlight." Asked what kind of wine he prefers, Diogenes says, "Someone else's." Hearing that Plato and his followers have defined man as a "featherless biped," he carries a plucked chicken into their lectures—"Plato's man!" And he roams the marketplace with a lantern in broad daylight, explaining that he's looking for a real human being.

Lawrence Klepp is a writer in New York.

Cynics
by William Desmond
California, 296 pp., $18.95

There are over a thousand extant anecdotes about Diogenes, according to William Desmond, an Irish university professor and scholar of classical philosophy, in this wide-ranging history of the most eccentric and maybe the most modern of ancient philosophical movements. Diogenes was said to have written dialogues, tragedies, letters, even his own anarchist *Republic*. Only the anecdotes survive, and nobody knows which, if any, aren't apocryphal.

He was called "Socrates gone mad" and "cynic" comes from *kynikos*, "dog-like," dogs being insouciant about what they eat, where they sleep, bodily functions, and so on. He famously lived in a tub (actually, Desmond tells us, a *pithos*, a large earthenware storage jar), but there was method in his Socratic madness, and a liberating ideal in his dogged shamelessness.

Because of Diogenes as much as Socrates, philosophy became associated with a simple and somewhat

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defiant life in which virtue is more essential to contentment and fulfillment than wealth, comfort, or conformity to arbitrary social conventions and laws. Together, they were the two most popular and influential archetypes of "the philosopher" in the ancient world.

Where Socrates used sly *faux naif* irony, Diogenes used insult and wit and Dadaist antics. And however outrageous his provocations, his purpose was to free humanity from its burden of artificial needs and false ambitions, allowing people to live simply and calmly in the present moment, where they might unexpectedly find themselves happy.

He was born in Sinope, a Greek town on the Black Sea. He seems to have been forced into exile, later remarking that it had turned him into a philosopher. He lived a long life in Athens and later Corinth.

According to one story, his father had been accused in Sinope of "defacing the coinage." In any case, the phrase became a metaphor and *modus operandi* for the Cynics. Their subversive jokes and diatribes were meant to rub away the customs and prejudices of this or that polis, revealing the more natural, universal values lying beneath. And Diogenes, in exile from philosophical and other forms of respectability as well as his birthplace, coined the word *cosmopolitan*—citizen of the universe—for himself, later taken up by the Stoics.

Cynicism may have set out to scandalize traditional Greek sensibilities, but it remained very Greek. While other Greek philosophical schools—especially Stoicism—overcame the initial Roman resistance to those clever, fast-talking, unreliable, duplicitous Greek intellectuals, and Greek philosophers eventually swarmed to Rome as teachers and gurus, Cynicism never caught on there. Its scabrous humor, Desmond says, clashed with Roman decorum and gravitas. But in the Greek-speaking eastern half of the empire, Cynicism transcended its Attic origins and eventually crossed over into other cultures and movements, maybe even Christianity.

Desmond notes the recent serious scholarly speculation about Cynicism as an influence on Jesus of Nazareth, a Galilean town near several flourishing Greek-speaking cities, where a common sight at the time would be wandering Cynic philosophers preaching a radically simplified way of life in which wealth and prudent conventional wisdom are abandoned. And he agrees that Jesus' "Consider the lilies" could have been any Cynic's paean to natural self-sufficiency, and that his praise of poverty and humility, his scathing denunciations of the rich and the rigidly pious, his exhortations to give away possessions, and his paradoxes such as "the last shall be first," all echo Cynic themes.

But he finally rejects this line of conjecture. Jesus and his followers were radical iconoclasts, but they remained fervently religious, and the self-denial of early Christians was meant to ensure a swift passage to another, better, purely spiritual life. The Cynics, on the other hand, were irreverent to the point of blasphemy and had no heaven to promise, just a frugal but real happiness and peace in this life, which was achieved by reducing desires to their natural minimum and then freely indulging them: self-mastery, yes; self-mortification, no.

"Hunger is the best sauce," as Diogenes, with one foot in austerity, the other in *joie de vivre*, would say.

Jesus being ruled out, none of the later Cynic philosophers, despite (or because of) the fact that in some cases portions of their written work survive, measures up to Diogenes in originality and interest. Still, there was, for instance, Hipparchia, one of the handful of female philosophers in antiquity, who married Crates, another Cynic, making a rare Cynical marriage (cynical marriages are not so rare). They supposedly had sex with each other in public, much like Diogenes with himself. Most Cynics avoided marriage as a superfluous social convention.

There were also literary Cynics, since the movement bred a robust satirical tradition. The great second-century Syrian-born satirist Lucian, who scorned the itinerant Cynic philosophers of his own day as idlers and leeches, praised Diogenes and carried on his mission of puncturing pomposity and complacency and conventional belief with playful, absurdist wit.

But Lucian was right. By late antiquity what was left of Cynicism seems to have degenerated into an indolent pre-modern bohemia, and we know how tiresome self-righteous hedonists—reformed addicts, affluent hippies, shrill Hollywood actors—can be.

When Julian the Apostate, the fourth-century emperor, tried to revive a dying paganism some 700 years after Diogenes, he portrayed him as a holy ascetic, the pagan equivalent of a saint, devout and pure, editing out the outrages. It was too late. The last few disconsolate Cynics coincided with the last few emperors of Rome. (In the Byzantine East, solitary bearded hermits and monks were a very faint reminder of the solitary bearded Cynics who once roamed the same territory.)

Every civilization seems eventually to suffer from a sense of surfeit and overcomplication that makes it look for an exit marked "nature" or "simplicity." It took only a few centuries of Greek civilization, and, at roughly the same time that the first Cynics were annoying Athenian Platonists and prigs, the Taoists were confusing Confucians in China. The Taoists were far more mystical, but like the Cynics, they used wit and paradox and sought return to a natural, pared-down, poor but peaceful life.

In modern Western civilization, Rousseau and Thoreau and D.H. Lawrence and nudists and New Agers have all, in turn, taken up the back-to-nature theme, or wild goose chase, unfortunately losing the Cynic and Taoist sense of humor along the way.

In his chapter on the Cynic legacy, Desmond aptly discusses Rousseau at some length. And he finds Cynic subtexts, plausibly enough, in *King Lear* and *Huckleberry Finn.* He pays tribute to modern anarchists and bohemians

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and hobos, but he doesn't specifically mention existentialists. Existentialism, with its distrust of system and abstraction, its focus on the here and now and on the solitary individual estranged from arbitrary social imperatives, and its affinities with absurdist writers like Pirandello, Ionesco, and Beckett, could be seen as a modernized—that is, a more convoluted, solemn, and sanctimonious—form of Cynicism.

He does take up Nietzsche, who bluntly said that Diogenes was superior to Alexander the Great and that Cynicism is "the highest one can reach on earth." He liked their self-mastery, simple food, and nomadic, free life, and he borrowed Diogenes and his lantern for his parable of the madman looking for God. And Nietzsche's own unsystematic, aphoristic style, laced with provocative diatribes and asides, resembles the anti-philosophy of Diogenes—and they both mocked Plato, too.

Desmond is right to bring him in, yet Nietzsche lurched into portentous prophetic posturing and an aristocratic and aesthetic elitism far from Diogenes' populist, earthy, slapstick streak. For all his insistent praise of lightness and laughter, Nietzsche, too, finally lost his sense of humor along the way.

I would suggest that satirists and comedians are on more familiar terms with Diogenes' ghost than any modern philosopher. Rabelais invoked him, Ambrose Bierce's terse sardonic jibes in *The Devil's Dictionary* seem at times to be channeling him. Silent film comedians, the Marx Brothers, and the more reckless and obscene stand-up comics from Lenny Bruce on, are practicing Diogenists, too, since it's in popular entertainment that you find a match for his farcical theatrics and aggressive shamelessness.

Rabelais made up a neo-Greek word—*agelasts*, those who cannot laugh—for the puritans and fanatics and conceited fools of his day. We have our own versions of the same thing. The true heir of Diogenes the Cynic would probably be any dog that bites any *agelast* in the seat of the pants. ♦

A Man, a Plan . . .

When one branch of government declares war on another. **BY CHARLOTTE ALLEN**

BETTMANN / CORBIS

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Sen. Joseph T. Robinson, 1937

On February 5, 1937, just 16 days after his inauguration to his second presidential term, Franklin D. Roosevelt called a surprise meeting of his cabinet in the White House's West Wing in which he unveiled to the cabinet, Congress, the press, and the nation a proposal for a dramatic reorganization of the federal judiciary that became known as his court-packing plan.

FDR v. The Constitution
The Court-Packing Fight and the Triumph of Democracy
by Burt Solomon
Walker, 352 pp., $27

Although the legislative scheme that Roosevelt outlined—and expected Congress to enact—ostensibly sought to modernize the operations of all federal courts at all levels, its real target was the Supreme Court, which, during his first term, had systematically overturned huge portions of New Deal legislation on constitutional grounds. FDR's aim was to expand the court, to "pack" it with liberal-minded justices of his own choosing who would issue rulings more favorable to his legislative project.

Roosevelt had won the 1936 election by a crushing landslide—a total of 61 percent of the popular vote that enabled him to carry all but two of the 48 states—and his Democratic coalition of labor, northern liberals, and the Solid South had similarly steamrollered through Congress in 1936, leaving the wounded Republicans, who had reigned supreme in both houses during the prosperous 1920s, with a pathetic 17 senators (out of 96) and 88 House members (out of 435).

Charlotte Allen is a contributing editor to the Manhattan Institute's Minding the Campus website.

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Not without reason, Roosevelt interpreted his sweeping victory as an overwhelmingly successful referendum on the New Deal, a massive expansion of federal supervisory power into economic arenas that had once been solely the province of states and localities, all in the name of combating the effects of the Depression on working people.

Only the Supreme Court—or at least a majority of its nine justices—consistently refused to go along with the New Deal's sudden (most of the laws had been passed by a compliant Congress during Roosevelt's famous "Hundred Days" in 1933) and massive intrusion of federal power into the setting of prices, wages, and maximum working hours in private economic transactions in ways skewed to benefit two key Roosevelt constituencies, farmers and laborers, typically at the expense of manufacturers, middlemen, retailers, entrepreneurs, and ultimately consumers.

In striking down such legislative pillars of the New Deal as the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), a 1933 law that levied food processors in order to pay farmers to cut production (to the point of destroying crops and killing livestock), and the National Industrial Recovery Act (NRA), which authorized the regulation of prices, wages, working hours, and output in a daunting array of industries large and small, the Supreme Court invoked provisions of the Constitution that appeared to limit the power of Congress to enact such sweeping and unprecedented laws that essentially legalized cartels and price-fixing collusion.

The constitutional provision most frequently invoked in those rulings was the so-called Commerce Clause (Article 1.8.3 of the Constitution), then strictly interpreted by the conservatives (and even, from time to time, its liberals) to permit Congress to regulate the flow of goods in interstate transit but not to interfere with strictly local economies. For example, the Supreme Court had voted unanimously in 1935, in the case of *Schechter Poultry* v. *U.S.*, to strike down the entire NRA on Commerce Clause grounds. The Schechter brothers, who operated a kosher chicken-slaughtering plant in Brooklyn, had argued that since they sold their fowl entirely inside the state of New York, they were not involved in interstate commerce and the federal government had no constitutional authority to micromanage wages and prices at a fine-grained level.

The Court also struck down state laws setting minimum prices and hourly wages during Roosevelt's first term. The constitutional ground on which those rulings rested was usually the 14th Amendment, which guarantees equal protection of the laws and forbids states to "deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law."

The Four Horsemen of the Supreme Court were not simply cartoon holdovers from horse-and-buggy days, but jurists who believed that the Constitution's drafters sought to enshrine a comprehensive notion of personal freedom.

The Supreme Court, during the first third of the 20th century, tended to interpret the 14th Amendment in a broadly libertarian fashion known as "substantive due process" that protected the right to enter into contracts and other economic arrangements free of state interference. Thus, in 1936, the justices ruled that Joseph Tipaldo, owner of a laundry in Brooklyn (again!) was constitutionally entitled to defy a state minimum wage law and pay his laundresses whatever amount made business sense to him.

A slew of such death-dealing decisions, leading to public outcry and the disbanding of some of the alphabet-soup federal agencies set up to enforce the New Deal, infuriated Roosevelt. The court-packing scheme, concocted with the help of Attorney General Homer Cummings, was designed to neutralize the power of the Court's conservative bloc, four justices—Willis Van Devanter, James McReynolds, George Sutherland, and Pierce Butler—who had been appointed years earlier by Presidents Taft, Wilson, and Harding. The four typically voted as a unit, together with whatever moderates they could persuade to their side.

Under FDR's court-packing bill, for every Supreme Court justice who had not retired by age 70-and-a-half, the president could appoint an additional, younger justice up to a maximum number of 6, swelling the size of the Court from 9 jurists to a potential 15. (As it happened, all Four Horsemen were over 70 in early 1937: Van Devanter, the eldest, was 77.)

The ostensible reasons for Roosevelt's proposal were to relieve the Supreme Court's crowded docket that resulted in its rejecting 87 percent of appeals for review, and also, as FDR repeatedly hinted to a press that he assiduously flattered, to counteract the deleterious effect of old age upon the judicial mind. Elderly justices were not only set in their ways, because they hailed from another era, but positively senile—"tenacious of the appearance of adequacy," as the president explained to much laughter at a press conference. The real reasons were obvious to everyone.

Roosevelt's bill should have been a shoo-in. He had a compliant Democratic Congress, including a formidable arm-twister, Senate majority leader Joseph Robinson of Arkansas, to whom he had all but promised the next Court seat that fell vacant. Roosevelt also had enormous popularity on his side (a 65 percent approval rating at the start of his second term) as well as a progressive-minded press that ridiculed, in editorial cartoons and elsewhere, the Supreme Court's "nine old men" as bewhiskered pettifoggers who snoozed on the bench when not quibbling pointlessly. Roosevelt could also claim the support of the Constitution, which explicitly leaves it to Congress

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to set the number of justices, and the lawmakers had altered the size of the High Court eight times before fixing the number at nine during the presidency of Ulysses S. Grant.

Instead, as the spring of 1937 overripened into Washington's intolerable summer heat, and debate dragged on thanks to the efforts of recalcitrant senators whom Robinson could not cajole and Roosevelt could not cow, the bill's progress faltered, public support for it waned, and it died an ignominious death in July, when the Senate voted 70-20 to send it back to committee, whence it emerged as an innocuous judicial overhaul that left the number of justices intact. It had not helped that Robinson, who suffered from chronic heart trouble, had collapsed and died in his stifling Capitol Hill apartment the week before.

FDR v. The Constitution, meticulously researched and entertainingly narrated by Burt Solomon, a longtime Washingtonian himself and veteran writer for *National Journal*, explains how this debacle, Franklin Roosevelt's most humiliating defeat during all of his four terms in office, came about.

Solomon focuses on the tactical mistakes that Roosevelt made. Chief among them was his decision to spring the scheme on Congress as a secretly drafted *fait accompli*, which undoubtedly ruffled many feathers on Capitol Hill. The cocksure FDR also resisted all offers of compromise, such as enlarging the Court by two justices instead of six. Even worse, his cracks to the press about mental impairment among septuagenarian justices alienated his most reliably liberal ally on the Court, who had voted to uphold nearly all of his New Deal legislation: Louis Brandeis, who also happened to be, at age 80, the oldest of the nine. (The chief justice, Charles Evans Hughes, a Republican moderate who often voted with the liberals, was 74, and the others were in their sixties.)

Brandeis was incensed. A friend and protégé of Oliver Wendell Holmes, he considered himself to have the sharpest mind among his colleagues, including his two fellow liberals, Harlan Fiske Stone and Benjamin Cardozo. Brandeis, working through his wife Alice, who had social connections to Washington Democrats, launched a behind-the-scenes lobbying effort to derail Roosevelt's plan.

The real heroes of Solomon's book, however, are Sen. Burton K. Wheeler, an otherwise ultra-progressive Democrat from Montana who believed (as he told a radio audience) that reshaping the Supreme Court to make it "subservient" to the president's wishes was fundamentally undemocratic, and smacked of the despotism of Hitler and Stalin; and Owen Roberts, appointed to the Court by Herbert Hoover in 1930. Roberts, an unpretentious Republican from Pennsylvania who had won fame as the chief prosecutor in the Teapot Dome scandals, had mostly voted with the Four Horsemen in the New Deal and related cases.

For example, Roberts, along with Hughes, had joined the Horsemen in a 6-3 vote in 1936 in *U.S.* v. *Butler* to invalidate the AAA on the grounds that its tax on food processors to subsidize farmers violated the Constitution's Tenth Amendment, which limits the power of Congress to legislate in areas not specifically set forth elsewhere in the Constitution. Roberts had also joined the Horsemen to invalidate New York's minimum wage law in the Tipaldo case, another 5-4 ruling.

Nonetheless, in a decision announced on March 29, 1937, more than a month after Roosevelt announced his court-packing plan, Roberts suddenly moved to the other side, throwing his weight against the Horsemen to form a slim majority with the liberals and Hughes to uphold a Washington state minimum wage law in the case of *West Coast Hotel Co.* v. *Parrish*. Roberts wrote no opinion in *Parrish*, and he destroyed his personal papers before his death, so no one knows exactly why he changed his constitutional position. The press assumed that expediency was his main motive—warding off the planned expansion—and his *Parrish* vote became known as "the switch in time that saved nine."

In fact, Roberts appeared to have formulated his stance as early as December 1936, and in 1934 he had voted with Hughes and the liberals to uphold a New Deal-style price-fixing system for

The 'Nine Old Men,' 1937

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milk in *Nebbia* v. *New York*. Still, his apparent philosophical shift, coupled with the retirement of Van Devanter in May 1937, to be replaced by the staunch New Dealer Senator Hugo Black of Alabama, removed much of the sense of urgency from Roosevelt's crusade.

Meanwhile, across the street at the Capitol, Burton Wheeler cobbled together an alliance of Republicans, led by Idaho's William Borah, and conservative Democrats such as Maryland's Millard Tydings and Virginia's Carter Glass, to eviscerate Roosevelt's plan on the Senate floor. (A vengeful FDR tried to purge the Senate of his Democratic court-packing opponents in the 1938 elections, but his efforts failed dismally, and Republicans ended up gaining seats in both houses.)

In Solomon's view, the battle over Roosevelt's efforts to remold the Supreme Court was a crucial battle to preserve the Constitution—that is, to preserve the Constitution's tripartite structure of federal governance that enables the American system of checks and balances to work. Had FDR's political will prevailed, the Supreme Court would have been irretrievably politicized and weakened: "But by facing down a powerful president and defeating him," Solomon writes, "the Court not only preserved its independence but also underscored and reinforced it, in the public eye as well as its own."

The strongest feature of Solomon's study is his ability to make the constitutional wrangling come alive as a battle involving real, three-dimensional people—Franklin Roosevelt, Burton Wheeler, Owen Roberts—with vivid personalities whose contours he deftly delineates. He has a gift for you-were-there details: the sweltering Washington summer that drove residents from their oven-like homes after dark to sleep outdoors alongside the Potomac; the fact that at least three of the nine justices lived in rental apartments, unimaginable today; the sumptuous, old-fashioned White House food—roast pheasant, terrapin soup—with which FDR plied potential allies; the exuberant popular culture of the mid-1930s, featuring the likes of Fred Astaire, Jack Benny, Frank Capra, Busby Berkeley, and the first-magnitude lights of the All-Star Game of 1937. Even Seabiscuit makes a brief appearance here.

Where *FDR v. The Constitution* lists badly is in its failure to take any of the constitutional arguments seriously in the battles between Court liberals and conservatives over the meaning of the Commerce Clause, substantive due process, and the like. In Solomon's view, those battles were strictly ideological and sentimental: The three liberals were "compassionate" figures who believed in an expansive reading of the Constitution, which might not have been what its drafters had in mind but which comported with the "realities of modern life" and accorded federal and state governments "the power to ease America's suffering" and "help people who could not compete in the marketplace on their own."

By contrast, the hard-line Four Horsemen, according to Solomon, believed in dog-eat-dog Social Darwinism (Charles Darwin, of all people, comes in for a real drubbing in this book) and in laissez-faire capitalism, which they deemed to have been "woven" into the Constitution. Roberts might have switched sides, Solomon believes, after reading about a fellow Pennsylvanian, an indebted farmer facing eviction, who seized a shotgun and killed a neighbor when his farm might have been saved by the AAA that Roberts had voted to invalidate.

I won't go into the debatable economic premises on which Solomon's black-and-white categorization rests—such as whether the New Deal's creation of a comprehensive regime of artificially high prices mitigated the Depression or prolonged it; or whether it's better to work for sub-minimum wages or stand in a breadline. Nor will I dwell on what Amity Shlaes points out in *The Forgotten Man*: that the victims of New Deal legislation were often ethnic small businessmen, such as the Schechters, Joseph Tipaldo, and Leo Nebbia, an Italian-American grocer in upstate New York who ran afoul of the state's dairy-pricing laws by throwing in a free loaf of bread with two quarts of milk to lure customers.

My point is that the Four Horsemen of the Supreme Court were not simply cartoon holdovers from horse-and-buggy days, but jurists who believed that the Constitution's drafters sought to enshrine a comprehensive notion of personal freedom, which is what they believed the drafters meant when they used such words as "liberty," "property," and "due process," and stated explicitly that Congress's powers, regarding interstate commerce and other matters, were limited to those powers enumerated in the Constitution itself.

Liberty, in the view of the Horsemen, included the liberty to make contracts and to enter into economic arrangements that some might find disadvantageous. The idea of substantive due process is no more unwarranted as an interpretation of the Constitution than *Roe* v. *Wade*, in which a later generation of justices found a right to nearly unrestricted abortion somewhere in the 14th Amendment.

The Court's four conservatives were not without personal flaws. McReynolds, for example, was a notorious anti-Semite who refused to speak to either Brandeis or Cardozo—although he entertained the Jewish department-store magnate Julius Garfinckel in his home, and voted in favor of the Schechters along with the rest of the justices. Another of the Horsemen, Butler, had been the lone dissenter in *Buck* v. *Bell* (1927), which upheld the compulsory sterilization of a mentally retarded woman on the ground that, as Justice Holmes put it, "three generations of imbeciles are enough."

In any event, although Roosevelt lost the battle for a Supreme Court more to his liking, he won the war. By 1941 all four Horsemen were either retired or dead, replaced by FDR with liberals who, in turn, forged a majority that not only upheld expansive government regulation at all levels but overturned dozens of earlier decisions. The Court's insouciance about precedent hurtled Roberts (and Hughes as well) back into the conservative camp. After writing dissent after dissent taking issue with

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what he believed was the Court's indulgence in a purely results-oriented jurisprudence, and also feeling increasingly isolated—Black, in particular, became a personal enemy—Roberts resigned in 1945.

Ironically, as the Court grew increasingly liberal, substantive due process made a backdoor comeback, although with a different focus. The Supreme Court began to use the 14th Amendment as a vehicle for finding substantive rights, mentioned nowhere in the written Constitution, not only to abortion but to contraceptives, gay sex, and physician-assisted death. The Supreme Court preserved its independence, but to ends that no one during the 1930s could have anticipated.

FDR v. The Constitution may substitute sentiment for legal analysis here and there, but it also provides an informative and highly readable way to learn how this dramatic transformation in constitutional thinking came about. ♦

Black Humor

One-liners from the national conversation on race.

BY ZACH MUNSON

Just to get this out of the way, a disclaimer and an admission: I am white. Yes, white. Caucasian (Caucasian-American?). Of European descent. A honky, if you will.

Larry Wilmore's new book is, as its title suggests, a collection of "black" thoughts. Now, I know what you're probably thinking. You're thinking, "Hey, White Guy, who are *you* to review this book of 'black' thoughts?" Well, it's true that, being white, I do not have black thoughts. So I will refrain from commenting on the veracity of these black thoughts, or their value to the black community (of which, as a honky, I am not a part).

I'd Rather We Got Casinos
And Other Black Thoughts
by Larry Wilmore
Hyperion, 288 pp., $23.99

That said, I am a citizen in good standing (however pale) of our race-obsessed nation. As such, I think I can fairly report that, while Wilmore's book never quite delivers the hoped-for comedic punch, it *does* offer a handful of amusing essays and ideas. And his calm, straightforward, self-deprecating voice is a welcome addition to the often maddening cacophony that is our long, enduring, long, ever-urgent (did I mention long?) national conversation on race.

Zach Munson is a writer and comedian.

Wilmore is a comedy writer of great pedigree: A veteran of *In Living Color*, *The Daily Show*, and *The Office*, he also won an Emmy for his work on *Bernie Mac*. This is his first book. Much of it seems to be a joke in search of punch line. There are some old standby topics: The ubiquitous Man, ever striving to keep a brother down; black people talking too much at the movies; a guide to angry black churches; an attempt to ascertain if Jesus was black. These topics have been well covered elsewhere.

Also, *Casinos* is full of all kinds of unnecessary set-ups. Wilmore starts each chapter with a fake explanation from a fake professor who is credited as the director of the fake Historically Oppressed Peoples Enterprise (HOPE). There are some fake radio transcripts, with fake commercial breaks written into them. There are fake speeches, a fake eulogy, a fake interview with a fake alien abductee, even a fake missing chapter from a fake earlier book.

Why this contrivance? It offers some context, I guess. But since when do jokes about race relations need any context? We live in the context. One might say *I'd Rather We Got Casinos* exists because we're all contexted out. And all this artifice has the effect of sucking some of the life out of Wilmore's writing, which is actually quite sound, especially by the (not very high) standard of humor books.

This is not to say that Larry Wilmore has nothing of interest to say. He does venture into some original topics, and he comes up with some interesting proposals. He starts off with a snappy email to the NAACP declaring that "African American, as a brand, is done." Wilmore feels no connection to Africa, a place, he says, "where you have to hunt your food, black people speak French, and you could get malaria." Wilmore even

Larry Wilmore

NEWSCOM

feels for the nonblacks who are forced to use the term for fear of being called racist: "It wears [nonblack folks] down to constantly say 'black—oops,

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sorry, African American, bla—oops, sorry African American." He suggests "chocolate" instead because, as he says, "who doesn't love chocolate?" He even advocates different kinds of chocolate for different kinds of black people.

The NAACP, as I write, remains unconvinced. But Wilmore's playful proposal brings a much-needed lightheartedness to the mercilessly serious question of whom we are allowed to call what.

One of the high points comes when Wilmore lays out his case to be our next black leader. His list of qualifications is impressive:

> I'm really good at rhyming. . . . I can find blame in places you haven't even thought of looking yet. . . . You'll never be able to pin down what I do for a living. . . . When I get angry, white people are afraid of me.

This piece garners some genuine out-loud laughs, and leaves this reader, at least, convinced that Wilmore is the man for the job. There are other funny bits as well. "Black Weathermen Make Me Happy" leads into "Black Weathermen Make Me Sad." You're left wanting more of Wilmore's Random Black Thoughts—on sudoku: "I have no black thoughts on Sudoku"—although most of the jokes fall flat in "It's OK to Hate Black People Who Work at McDonald's at the Airport (It Doesn't Make You a Racist)." Still, it's hard not to love Wilmore for going there, and so casually at that.

In his final chapter he uses some concrete examples to point out the difference between real racism and things that are simply "not brotha friendly."

> *The Simpsons*: Not racist, but not very brotha friendly.
>
> *Family Guy*: Racist but brotha friendly.
>
> *Democrats*: Used to be racist and not brotha friendly. They're still racist but very brotha friendly.
>
> *Watermelon and fried chicken*: Very racist but extremely brotha friendly.

Wilmore argues that the way to end racism is to end the flagrant misuse of the term, as he succinctly and refreshingly notes: "[N]ot everything that seems racist is racist. The problem is that people are so touchy these days everything gets that label just to avoid conflict. Though what ends up happening is more conflict is created by falsely labeling a nonracist incident." And unlike many comics and politicians (black and white) who deal with race, Wilmore does not seek to shock, appall, or enrage. He seeks to poke fun and make light of the many foibles, quirks, and predilections to which we race-obsessed Americans are prone.

I'd Rather We Got Casinos is not shocking, or deliberately offensive, or an assault on the senses, or a polemic, or even particularly political. Much of it isn't uproariously, laugh-out-loud hilarious. But it is, at times, amusing. And well written. And honest. Short and to the point. In good fun. Some of Wilmore's modest proposals are even well argued. His writing, his whole book, his whole attitude is lighthearted, self-deprecating, without rancor—everything that our serious, cloying, dishonest, drab, long-winded, morally inconsistent, self-aggrandizing, bitter, buzz-kill of a national conversation on race is not. ♦

Rebels With Cause

The key to a successful revolution is the shopkeepers.

BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

Dramatic events in Iran, as weeks of tumult turn into months, seem to reproduce archival images of the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, as well as images from the Chinese democracy movement of 1989. Ordinary people have taken to the streets in angry masses, risking their lives and dying, to protest the tyrannical rule of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the clerical dictators who support him.

But as Iranian demonstrators and sympathetic foreigners swing between pessimism and euphoria, the probable defeat of the Iranian insurrection—like that in China 20 years ago—poses a question: Why do democratic movements fail? Is the superior strength of repressive systems the only explanation?

Democracy Denied, 1905-1915
Intellectuals and the Fate of Democracy
by Charles Kurzman
Harvard, 404 pp., $49.95

Charles Kurzman is a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina and expert on Iran, who has distinguished himself with his work on "liberal" and "modernizing" Islam. This new study is uniquely valuable, as well as suddenly relevant, in bringing together three topics, two of which have been lately neglected, and one that is widely (but so far inconclusively) debated. These issues involve history, sociology, and religion.

Kurzman discerns an important pattern in early 20th century events: a "chain of revolutions" beginning in czarist Russia and in Persia (later Iran) beginning in 1905; in Turkey in 1908; in Portugal and Mexico in 1910; and, as the most enduring challenge to

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world order, in China in 1911. That is the historical aspect. Sociology emerges here because of the special role of intellectuals in each upheaval. That term is defined somewhat differently now than it was then, when it referred primarily to working journalists and other participants in the open marketplace of ideas, rather than to academics and established authors. Faith assumes a role because all six examples were culturally dominated by traditional, backward-looking religious hierarchies: Russia by Orthodox Christianity, Persia and Turkey by conservative forms of Islam, China by Confucianism, and Portugal and Mexico by decrepit forms of Roman Catholicism.

For today's reader, the most absorbing sections of this book are likely to be those taking up Iran, since common wisdom, both among critics of Islamic society and enemies of the neoconservative vision for Iraq and Afghanistan, holds that the faith of the Prophet Muhammad and democracy are incompatible. In reality, as Kurzman records in detail, numerous partisans of change in the Muslim empires embraced a modernizing, rationalist, reformist, and positivist Islamic vocabulary. Turkish enlighteners, in particular, equated progress with a Muslim spirit, finding inspiration in the Koranic principle of enjoining good and avoiding evil. Islamic clerics were more active in the democratic movement in Iran than in Turkey. Still, years before the imposition of militaristic secularism by Mustafa Kemal (who called himself "Atatürk," or "father of the Turks"), progressives forced the Ottoman state to reduce the salaries of Islamic religious functionaries.

Of course, the democratic revolutions of 1905-1915 were doomed, and for reasons that had nothing to do with religion. Reading *Democracy Denied*, you have to wonder if democracy was denied or stillborn. Russia eventually succumbed to Leninism, Turkey to Kemalism, Iran to the monarchy of the Pahlavis and then to the Islamic Revolution of Khomeini, Portugal to the authoritarian Salazar regime, Mexico to the pseudo-democracy of the (ironically named) Institutional Revolutionary Party, and China to Maoist Communism.

Kurzman outlines some factors that would make these failures inevitable, including the hostility of the great powers. The supremacism of rich nations clearly provided one obstacle to the consolidation of democratic rule. In a citation that should make any American wince, but which echoes the arrogance both of Islam-baiters and neo-isolationists during the Iraq war, an American diplomat said this about the Iranian constitutionalist movement of 1905: "[T]he [Iranian] people are not in a condition to appreciate the benefits of a constitutional form of government, and are much less fit to govern themselves than are the Filipinos." This was elaborated at a time when many Americans considered the Filipinos little more than savages! Fortunately, few opinions like this have been heard during the present Iranian convulsion.

Some of these countries, with Iran in the forefront, show that the consequences of unsuccessful democratic revolutions remain with us. Russia has come under the command of a new aspiring strongman, Vladimir Putin, and may be said to have suffered multiple failed democratic transformations. The fall of the Ottoman sultan had consequences in the Middle East and the Balkans that are still felt, and remains a matter of convoluted and acrimonious debate in Turkey today. The Mexican Revolution led to the undeniable, if contradictory, modernization of our principal Latin neighbor, but Mexico is also a center of widespread criminality. The Chinese Revolution, in some sense, never ended—although it passed through and exhausted its (brief) democratic and (long) Communist phases, the process of modernization remains turbulent, with consequences for the rest of the world.

The Ayatollah Khomeini, 1979

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Kurzman correctly points out that the Russian uprising of 1905 was "the first revolution covered 'live' by international telegraph services." This phenomenon was repeated in each of the crises, and created connections among the political struggles in all six countries, where local journalists found parallels with distant colleagues. Portuguese dissidents called themselves

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"Young Turks" in emulation of Ottoman reformers. "Thus began," writes Kurzman, "a global wave of democratic revolutions." In addition to democratic ferment in the press, the general populace in each country was suddenly drawn into debate about the future. Once the term "democracy," translated into the various languages, began to be discussed, ordinary people took it up, sometimes resulting in popular stories and jokes. A poor Iranian thought democracy was a kind of food, and complained he had received none; a Mexican allegedly explained that *Democracia* was the name of a certain politician's wife.

But the sequence of transformations that began in Russia in 1905—and continued, mainly through the east by way of the Muslim empires as far as China, and in the other direction, toward Portugal and Mexico—has not previously been described in such a general and useful historical survey. Russian socialist theoreticians, including Lenin and Trotsky, paid close attention to the "chain of revolutions," which led Lenin to proclaim a new alliance of radical labor movements in the West with anticolonial revolutionaries, and Trotsky to view the planetary sweep of radicalism as the underpinning for his theory of permanent revolution. But while it is folly to recommend a rereading of Russian radical leftist thinkers, they did perceive something that Kurzman has not, and explain both the collapse of the revolutionary upsurge of 1905-1915 and the likely failure of today's mass movement in Iran. Kurzman notes that Lenin called these early phenomena "bourgeois-democratic revolutions," but Kurzman also observes that Iran had almost no bourgeois class, that elsewhere the bourgeoisie failed to assist democratic movements, and that, in many cases, the bourgeoisie *opposed* democratic efforts.

The paradox of "bourgeois-democratic revolutions" without well-organized, self-conscious bourgeois classes and parties lies at the heart of the stillbirth of these doomed democratic revolutions. Lenin and other Marxists did not use the term "bourgeois-democratic revolution" to mean that the business classes would *necessarily* lead a democratizing struggle or consolidate a new, liberating regime. Instead, the concept proposed that such movements would aspire to "bourgeois-democratic" reforms rather than socialist revolutionary demands. To be sure, every commentator at the time believed that for a revolution to reach bourgeois democracy it had to produce a credible bourgeois leadership. Even Japan achieved its "capitalist revolution from above" in the late 19th century because of the role of its ruling elite.

Leon Trotsky, 1928

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Charles Kurzman affirms that the six countries analyzed here produced a resurgence of democracy, with varying degrees of success, at the end of the 20th century. Portugal was the first significant society after World War II to overthrow an authoritarian regime and replace it with a stable, democratic, and, yes, bourgeois system, beginning in 1974. But in all the countries where regime change has succeeded, there had to be a genuine alternative to the former dictatorship, and it had to be based in the business class. Such was the case in Spain after Franco's death, in Greece with the fall of the colonels, in the Philippines when Marcos was deposed, in South Korea as military rule ended, and even in Muslim Indonesia following the removal of Suharto.

We can hope that the Iranian struggle against clerical rule will end in an order based on entrepreneurship, accountability, and popular sovereignty—the essence of "bourgeois democracy." But Mir-Hussein Moussavi has failed to organize a separate political party, much less one with significant support from the commercial elite. If this Iranian uprising ultimately fails, the reason will be obvious: As in the first decade of the past century, the Iranian business class, sapped then by underdevelopment and today by the Islamist/socialist economic system imposed by Khomeinism, is too weak to follow in the steps of its Spanish, Greek, Filipino, Korean, and Indonesian counterparts and to grasp power from the faltering hands of Iran's oppressors. The primary lesson of 1905-1915 will be relearned, with tragic results, in the streets of Iran's cities: With all their faults and baggage, only business leaders can genuinely transform societies. ♦

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Need to Know?

Facebook forces us to pick our Fab Five.

BY KELLY JANE TORRANCE

Rob Fleming, the hero of Nick Hornby's pleasurable novel *High Fidelity*, approaches life as something to be ranked. He doesn't just have to hand the usual lists men of a certain obsessive temperament make—top five films, top five songs. When his live-in girlfriend Laura leaves him, practically his first step is to catalog his "desert-island, all-time, top five most memorable split-ups."

Rob might be trying to learn from his mistakes, but this list-making habit seems like a symptom of arrested development. If he hadn't been so devoted to the hobby of pigeonholing everything he experiences, he might not have lost Laura in the first place.

We're all self-absorbed Rob Flemings now. At least those of us on Facebook. The most popular application on that social networking site is LivingSocial, an add-on that lets its 24.5 million monthly active users share opinions on books, music, anything. The app grew exponentially when it introduced the "Pick Your Five" feature this spring, just as a Facebook redesign put the answers to such quizzes front and center. Nine million top five (or any five) lists were created the first week.

Subjects in which you can "Pick Your Five" range from the traditional party-game—Five Dead People You Would Invite to Dinner—to modern fun best had alone with a hard drink in hand: Top Five People I Want To Punch In The Face. (Osama bin Laden and Kanye West are fashionable picks there; I fear keeping company with the world's most notorious terrorist will only inflate troubled Kanye's ego more.)

Recently, the most popular top five was Favorite Songs Ever, followed by Five Favorite Pokémon. (That latter's surprising—it's obviously a fool's errand, with Pikachu clearly the best, and no others even memorable.) I'd like to think my friends (or "friends," as we say on Facebook) have a little more imagination. The quiz they've taken most is Five Things I Don't Leave the House Without. (I plan to stay on the good side of the guy who always carries a Swiss Army knife.)

You can even create your own categories. That's how I discovered how pernicious is this app that lets you get to know your "friends" better. Favorite Songs Ever wasn't interesting enough for me. So I created a Five Perfect Songs category. "Perfect" is, after all, a word that carries with it some idea of specific standards. But the difficulties inherent in crafting the perfect list were thus magnified—I had to create a perfect list of the perfect.

Rob Fleming made it look so easy. It's actually pretty hard to choose just five out of the, in this case, few million songs ever written. Talk about a fool's errand. I had to take my admiration of many genres of music, and boil it down into something digestible for Facebook's newsfeed. I limited myself to rock, and my first choice was easy: Blur's "Beetlebum" might not be their most riotous song (that's "Song 2") or most affecting (that's "Coffee & TV"). But it was surely a perfect song. So is the Stone Roses' "Love Spreads." Or do I just think so because it would also be on my favorite song list?

It got harder after that. The Beatles, after all, have written a lot of great songs. Shouldn't this most influential of bands feature on any list of songs? But most of their stuff has too much of a rough edge, attractive as it is, to be considered perfect. What exactly did I mean by "perfect," anyway? What started as a five-song, five-minute diversion turned into something more than five times longer. I suppose I had better get used to it. Brevity is no longer the soul of wit, or of lingerie—it's the only way to bare your soul. Long magazine pieces gave way to short ones, magazines gave way to blogs, blogs gave way to Facebook status updates, and now Facebook is giving way to Twitter's 140-character limit.

Nobody wants to have long conversations anymore: Say what you have to say—quickly—and then give somebody else a turn. That's the new democracy.

At least we're still interacting. In fact, "Pick Your Five" provides a means of communication in an age in which actual communication seems so *recherché*. Who picks up a phone, unless it's to send a text message? Telling people the Five Things I Could Grab From Where I'm Sitting: No cheating! says rather a lot about you—which is why you'll spend far too much time deciding which five things to mention. (I think I'd leave out my nail file; it could imply I'm vain or neurotic.)

Despite how painful these quizzes are to complete—would Doctor Johnson scare everyone else from my dinner table?—I'm glad these time-wasters exist. They'll eventually be the only way to learn about potential friends and mates. In the digital age, you can't examine someone's record collection: It's on their iPod. Soon, you won't peruse their bookshelves, either: Amazon's Kindle is making those obsolete. And what better way is there to sum up a person?

Rob Fleming succinctly tells us everything we need to know about one of his top five breakups: "Penny was nice-looking and her top five recording artists were Carly Simon, Carole King, James Taylor, Cat Stevens, and Elton John."

I had better start refining my enthusiasms. ♦

Kelly Jane Torrance writes about culture for the Washington Times.

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"Pakistanis who send jokes about [President] Asif Zardari by text message, email or blog risk being arrested and given a 14-year prison sentence."

—The Daily Telegraph (U.K.), July 21, 2009

Parody

The Federal Shariat Court
of The Islamic Republic of Pakistan

July 27, 2009

To: Deputy Minister for Law and Justice
From: Prosecutor-Inquisitor, Attorney General's Office

I include for your information a transcript of Mr. Shakhoor 'Shecky' Khan's "comic" monologue delivered at the Café Islamybad, located here in Islamabad, from the evening of Saturday, July 25. The Assistant Prosecutor-Inquisitor believes that, since the monologue has been disseminated on the Internet, it may be in violation of the 2009 Cyber Crimes Act, and warrant prosecution.

Hey, it's great to be back here at the Café Islamybad. You know, the audiences here are the best in the world. (Laughter, applause) I mean, when you've been in this business as long as I have (Applause) there's nothing like playing the political capital of a country. (Laughter) I mean, all those bureaucrats and generals and mullahs—man, the laughs never stop! (Laughter) The Café Islamybad. My agent told me there's only one good comedy club in Islamabad, and he couldn't get me booked there. (Laughter)

So here I am. Hey, how many of you watch The Delhi Show? (Applause) Yeah, I know it's on Indian Television, but that "fakir news" really cracks me up! You know, every time I watch Indian Television, I gotta say, "Those guys have nuclear weapons?" (Laughter) Talk about mass destruction! (Laughter) You could strap some Indian comedian on a missile and he'd bomb wherever he landed! (Laughter)

The Cafe Islamybad. You know, my wife likes to come here. Likes to bring her mother with her, too. (Laughter) And my other wife likes to bring her mother, too! (Laughter) Man, if I were any more pious, this place would sell out every night! (Laughter) No, seriously, my wife—she loves this place. So the other night, I ask her, "You wanna listen to President Zardari's speech on the radio, and take notes for me (Laughter) or you wanna go to your favorite club?" And the next thing I know she's dancing on that bar right over there, she's got her burqa all rolled up in a ball (Laughter) and these guys from Peshawar are yelling, "Take it Allah off, baby!" (Laughter, applause) and she's twirling around like a Dervish and

(cont.)

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